

Towards “Global Britain”:
Challenging the New Narratives
of National Decline
James Rogers



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James Rogers



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Global Britain Programme
Report No. 2017/2

It is a great pleasure to be here with you aboard HMS Queen Elizabeth today...This is the biggest and most complex warship ever built for the Royal Navy...This ship is a symbol of the United Kingdom as a great global, maritime nation...It sends a clear signal that as Britain forges a new, positive, confident role for ourselves on the world stage in the years ahead, we are determined to remain a fully engaged global power, working closely with our friends and allies around the world.

**Prime Minister Theresa May,
Portsmouth, 16th August 2017¹**

¹ ‘HMS Queen Elizabeth, Portsmouth: Theresa May’s Speech’, *Gov.uk*, 16 August 2017, available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/hms-queen-elizabeth-portsmouth-theresa-mays-speech>, last visited 25 August 2017.

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Executive Summary

- On 23rd June 2016, the British people voted in a national referendum, by a majority of 1.3 million, to leave the European Union (EU), putting more than 40 years of British foreign, security and defence policy in tumult.
- Since the vote, the national political scene has become tumultuous, with a high degree of political polarisation between the “Remain” and “Leave” camps.
- In light of the decision and the uncertain political atmosphere, arguments have been made that the United Kingdom (UK) is either too weak to fulfil the withdrawal negotiations or that it is about to begin a long period of economic and geopolitical decline.
- Economic growth in other regions of the world lends credibility that the UK - like most other Western states - will continue to decline relatively, but the outlook for most other European countries looks worse.
- Some declinist claims look decidedly more speculative, and even deceptive: the future is not pre-ordained, and what looks certain at this particular vantage point may look very different in only a few years from now.
- This report argues that, while the UK is some way behind the leading power, the US, and not far in front of France or China, its nearest competitors, it is nonetheless the world’s second most capable country, and the most capable country in Europe, with a broad range of geopolitical capabilities at its disposal.
- The report concludes by stressing that the UK will need to do two things to hold on to its position not only as the leading European power and one of the world’s foremost nations, but also its standard of living and way of life:
 - Firstly, it will need to develop a cross-partisan project of national revival as a “Global Britain”, albeit with a strong European vocation.
 - Secondly, it will need to boost its national capabilities, particularly its economic clout and military strength, to protect its interests in the increasingly uncertain twenty-first century world.

Preface

The first report of The Henry Jackson Society’s Global Britain Programme - “An Audit of Geopolitical Capability” - sought to rank the world’s eight most geopolitically capable countries, in accordance with their geographic, demographic, economic, technological, diplomatic, military and cultural capabilities.² The countries within the audit are China, France, Germany, India, Japan, Russia, the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States (US). With the exception of China, India and Japan, all of these countries are, in one way or another, also *European* powers, and thus influential in the region in which the UK is irrevocably and permanently located.

This second report - “Towards a Global Britain: Challenging the new narratives of national decline” - dovetails with the first report, but hones in and expands on the geopolitical capabilities of the UK alone. Given that the government, with the support of Parliament, has invoked Article 50 of the Treaty on European Union, kick-starting the process of withdrawal from the EU, and as the domestic political environment has polarised, giving rise to new narratives of national decline, the time is ripe to assess and evaluate, rigorously, the UK’s international position. This report is compiled with this objective in mind.

This report has the following structure: the introduction sets the stage for the discussion. Section 2 explains and analyses the new narratives of national decline - descriptive, speculative and deceptive - before revealing their political character. Section 3 moves on to focus on Britain’s own geopolitical capacity, with the goal of ascertaining whether the country has the foundations to remain a “major power” in comparison with the seven other countries that are commonly understood as its peers at the apex of the international system. The final section, the conclusion, asks whether the UK’s geopolitical capabilities are sufficient for the strategic role envisaged by the government, i.e., that of a “Global Britain”, before outlining how the country might enhance them.³ As such, it ends by asking what the UK could do to prevent a reduction in its global standing in the twenty-first century, particularly as it adapts to changed circumstances, not least owing to its decision to leave the EU.

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² Rogers, J., “An Audit of Geopolitical Capability: A Comparison of Eight Major Powers”, *The Henry Jackson Society* (2017), available at: <http://henryjacksonsociety.org/category/research/publication/an-audit-of-geopolitical-capabilities-part-1>, last accessed: 25 August 2017.

³ The outline for the vision, called ‘Plan for Britain’, can be found here: ‘Plan for Britain’, *Gov.uk* (undated), available at: <https://www.planforbritain.gov.uk/a-global-britain/>, last visited: 25 August 2017.

1. Introduction

For the past four decades, British policy has been to “pool” sovereignty with other European countries in formal structures and institutions in a common project of continental integration.⁴ This policy is now bankrupt and defunct. The British referendum on 23rd June 2016, which delivered a majority of 1.3 million people in favour of withdrawing from the EU, has forced – and will likely continue to force – fundamental political change on many levels. Indeed, within hours, the consequences of the result started to materialise, politically, economically and internationally. Politically, having failed to secure the referendum result the prime minister was hoping to obtain, David Cameron resigned as national leader, paving the way for Theresa May to become his successor. She went on to hold her own snap election but failed to secure a parliamentary majority, leading to a minority government and resulting in allegations that the UK has become a politically volatile country, much to the delight – it would seem – of some fervent pro-Europeans, such as Guy Verhofstadt and Martin Selmayr.⁵

Economically, the Pound Sterling has dropped in value, with 24th June 2016 being one of the worst days in its history.⁶ Since then, it has fallen in value by around 15%, damaging British purchasing power on international markets.⁷ Despite having a population approximately 20% smaller than Germany’s (and comparable to France’s), the British economy was – when measured nominally, in US dollars – only 15% smaller than the German economy and more than 15% bigger than the French economy in 2015. Now it is only 5% larger than the economy of France and almost 25% smaller than the economy of Germany.⁸ However, the dire economic consequences initially forecast by Her Majesty’s Treasury and an array of pro-European research institutions, including recession and an emergency budget – called ‘Project Fear’ by its detractors – have not (yet) come to pass.⁹ In fact, in 2016, only the German economy outperformed the British one in terms of economic growth among the Group of Seven industrialised powers, by a mere 0.1%.¹⁰ In 2017, though, the indicators have started to look bleaker: the British economy has

⁴ Although European integration had been advanced by several academics, politicians and civil society leaders, it was not until Winston Churchill advanced the idea in 1946 during his famous Zurich Speech that it started to emerge as a “mainstream” idea, and gain British and American approval. For an overview, see: European Commission, ‘Winston Churchill: calling for a United States of Europe’, *European Commission* (undated), available at: https://europa.eu/european-union/sites/europaeu/files/docs/body/winston_churchill_en.pdf, last visited: 25 August 2017.

⁵ See, for example: Lachman, D., ‘Theresa May’s Bad Brexit Bet’, *US News*, 9 June 2017, available at: <https://www.usnews.com/opinion/world-report/articles/2017-06-09/theresa-mays-brexite-snap-election-badly-backfired>, last visited: 25 August 2017. For the European Parliament’s UK Withdrawal Negotiator’s comments, see: Guy Verhofstadt, @GuyVerhofstadt, *Twitter*, 9 June 2017, available at: <https://twitter.com/GuyVerhofstadt/status/873083642255360000>, last visited: 25 August 2017. For the tweeting of cartoons by the Chief of Staff to the President of the European Commission, see: ‘EU sticks the boot in: Top eurocrat shares cartoon mocking Britain’s readiness for Brexit’, *Express*, 19 June 2017, available at: <http://www.express.co.uk/news/politics/818790/Brexit-news-Juncker-top-eurocrat-shares-cartoon-depicting-UK-chaos-talks>, last visited: 29 August 2017.

⁶ Cordell, J., ‘Cheer up, Friday was only the ninth worst day in the history of sterling’, *City AM*, 28 June 2016, available at: <http://www.cityam.com/244327/db-only-th-worst-day>, last visited: 25 August 2017.

⁷ See: Nelson, E., ‘The British pound isn’t the world’s worst currency in the one year since Brexit, but it’s close’, *Quartz*, 23 June 2017, available at: <https://qz.com/1013172/brexit-anniversary-the-british-pound-isnt-the-worst-performing-currency-in-the-one-year-since-the-vote-but-its-close/>, last visited: 25 August 2017.

⁸ Based on World Bank figures for Gross Domestic Product (2015 and 2016). See: ‘GDP (current US\$) for France, Germany and the United Kingdom (2015–2016)’, *World Bank* (2017), available at: <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.CD?contextual-default&end=2016&locations=GB-FR-DE&start=2015>, last visited 25 August 2017.

⁹ For an overview of the Treasury’s predictions and processes, see: National Audit Office, ‘HM Treasury’s economic analysis in the lead-up to the referendum on European Union membership’, *National Audit Office*, June 2017, available at: <https://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/HM-Treasury%E2%80%99s-economic-analysis-in-the-lead-up-to-the-referendum-on-European-Union.pdf>, last visited: 25 August 2017. For a detailed critique of the modelling applied by Her Majesty’s Treasury, see: Gudgin, G., et. al., ‘The Role of Gravity Models in Estimating the Economic Impact of Brexit’ (Working Paper No. 490), *Centre for Business Research, University of Cambridge*, June 2017, available at: https://www.cbr.cam.ac.uk/fileadmin/user_upload/centre-for-business-research/downloads/working-papers/wp490.pdf, last visited: 25 August 2017.

¹⁰ Monaghan, A., and Wearden, G., ‘Germany overtakes UK as fastest-growing G7 economy’, *The Guardian*, 23 February 2017, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/blog/2017/feb/23/germanys-gdp-shows-19-rise-over-last-year>, last visited: 25 August 2017.

not grown as rapidly as it was projected to, forcing the International Monetary Fund to cut its UK growth forecasts from a robust 2% to (a still respectable) 1.7%.¹¹

On the European mainland, most European governments have baulked or looked on in horror as the UK has begun to unwind 40 years of *formal* integration with its European partners.¹² For the first time in history, formal European integration has gone into reverse, both spatially and politically, ending the hope for a genuinely *European* union. Fears have been raised about the damage British withdrawal could do to European geopolitical cohesion: Andrzej Duda, the President of Poland, and Sebastian Kurz, the Austrian Foreign Minister, for example, have warned of a “domino effect”, which might lead to other European nations leaving the EU.¹³ It should be no surprise then that the reputation of the UK in the EU has been dented, if not hammered, by the outcome of the vote.¹⁴ Rather than a pragmatic and constructive – if sometimes obstinate and determined – country, the UK has come to be seen as a “bitter” and “irresponsible” vandal, which wants to be “alone”.¹⁵ Equally, the decision was met with either lukewarm acceptance or concern internationally, with Barack Obama, the former US President, stating he merely “accepted” the British decision, having previously stood against it; Malcolm Turnbull, the Australian Prime Minister, warning of “a degree of uncertainty”; and Shinzo Abe, the Japanese Prime Minister, warning he was “very concerned over the risks to the global economy, and financial and exchange markets”.¹⁶ Only the Russians and Iranians seemed to revel in the result, alongside the then US and French presidential candidates, Donald Trump and Marine Le Pen.¹⁷

In light of these developments, as well as the natural uncertainty generated by the largely unexpected result of the referendum, it can be no surprise that questions have been raised in relation to Britain’s international standing and future trajectory. Indeed, some of the answers have been tinged with a particularly negative outlook.

¹¹ ‘IMF downgrades UK and US growth forecasts’, *BBC News*, 24 July 2017, available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-40697473>, last visited: 25 August 2017.

¹² For an overview of the responses to the result of the referendum, see: ‘Brexit: Europe stunned by UK Leave vote’, *BBC News*, 24 June 2017, available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-eu-referendum-36616018>, last visited: 25 August 2017.

¹³ Cited in: ‘Brexit: World reaction as UK votes to leave EU’, *BBC News*, 24 June 2016, available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-eu-referendum-36614643>, last visited: 25 August 2017.

¹⁴ According to The British Council’s report ‘From the Outside In’, there has been a net decrease in the Group of Twenty (G20) EU members’ appreciation of the UK since the referendum, while, interestingly, among other G20 countries (i.e., non-EU countries), there has been a net increase. See: ‘From the outside in: G20 views of the UK before and after the EU referendum’, *The British Council*, June 2017, available at: https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/from_the_outside_in.pdf, last visited: 25 August 2017. In addition, the British Council’s December 2016 study, conducted on “millennials” (15–34-year-olds) in the Group of Twenty (G20) countries is equally illuminating: the reputation of the UK has suffered among millennials in the EU, but it has increased marginally among millennials from non-EU G20 countries. See: ‘As others see us: Perceptions of the UK from young people across G20 countries’, *The British Council*, December 2016, available at: https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/as_others_see_us_2016_0.pdf, last visited: 25 August 2017.

¹⁵ The President of Germany, Frank-Walter Steinmeier, for example, described the British decision to leave the EU as “bitter”, while Manfred Weber, the leader of the largest faction in the European Parliament, the European People’s Party, sought to remind the British people that they had voted to be “alone”. See Boffey, D., ‘German president attacks “irresponsible” Brexit campaign’, *The Guardian*, 4 April 2017, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2017/apr/04/german-president-attacks-irresponsible-brexit-campaign>, last visited: 25 August 2017.

¹⁶ See: ‘Brexit: World reaction as UK votes to leave EU’, *BBC News*, 24 June 2016.

¹⁷ See: ‘Brexit: World reaction as UK votes to leave EU’, *BBC News*, 24 June 2016. See also: Borger, J. and Patrick Wintour, ‘Russia and Iran delight in UK’s rejection of EU’, *The Guardian*, 24 June 2016, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2016/jun/24/russia-and-iran-delighted-at-uks-rejection-of-eu>, last visited: 25 August 2017.

2. The new narratives of national decline

Given the political and economic instability and the uncertainty surrounding EU withdrawal, as well as the general frustration – on the part of both “Brexiters” or “Leavers” who want to withdraw as quickly as possible, and “Remainers”, who want to stay inside in one form or another – the political space has become increasingly polarised, even crystallised. Consequently, British commentators and opinion-formers, particularly those hostile to leaving the EU, have grown louder and more intransigent. While some claims are analytical and appear to be made in good faith, pro-EU think tanks and media – even some foreign media – have been awash with gloomy forecasts of the UK’s impending stagnation, decline or even demise.¹⁸ Dire predictions – made with near certainty – have accompanied decisive statements on Britain’s inadequacy, humiliation and coming fall. Occasionally, the tone is even destructive and supercilious. It should be no surprise, then, that UK declinist narratives are back.

Already, a medley of former political leaders and civil servants, including former prime ministers like Sir John Major and Tony Blair; former deputy prime ministers, such as Nick Clegg; former chancellors of the exchequer, like Kenneth Clarke; and former foreign secretaries, such as Lord Hague and David Miliband, have forewarned that leaving the EU could stymie British international influence.¹⁹ While some, such as Mr. Major, have been more measured in their interventions, others have warned that the consequences of leaving the EU may be so profound that the UK may never recover from its decision.²⁰ A former head of the Secret Intelligence Service, John Sawers, has warned similarly that “Britain on its own will count for little in deciding how the west deals with the threats that face us.”²¹ Moreover, the historic British fear that the European mainland might come under an increasingly unified political actor, over which the UK would have little to no formal control, has also resurfaced.²² Lord Heseltine, a former deputy

¹⁸ Fox, K., ‘Great Britain? How the UK shapes up against the rest of the world’, *CNN.com*, 2 June 2017, available at: <http://edition.cnn.com/2017/06/02/europe/uk-economy-immigration-healthcare-charts/index.html>, last visited: 25 August 2017.

¹⁹ See: Stuart, H., ‘John Major attacks government over approach to Brexit’, *The Guardian*, 27 February 2017, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2017/feb/27/john-major-attacks-government-over-approach-to-brexit>, last visited: 25 August 2017; ‘John Major on the Realities of Brexit for Britain and Europe’, *Chatham House*, 27 February 2017, available at: <https://www.chathamhouse.org/file/john-major-realities-brexit-britain-and-europe>, last visited: 25 August 2017; Blair, T., ‘Brexit and the centre’, *The Tony Blair Institute for Global Change*, 15 July 2017, available at: <http://institute.global/news/brexit-and-centre>, last visited: 25 August 2017; ‘Nick Clegg’s Brexit Challenge’, *Liberal Democrats*, 8 September 2016 – 8 March 2017, available at: <https://www.libdems.org.uk/brexit-challenge>, last visited: 25 August 2017; Addley, E., ‘Ken Clarke on Brexit: “I’ve never seen anything as mad or chaotic as this”’, *The Guardian*, 5 February 2017, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2017/feb/05/ken-clarke-on-brexit-ive-never-seen-anything-as-mad-or-chaotic-as-this>, last visited: 25 August 2017; ‘UK to lose global influence after Brexit – Lord Hague’, *BBC News*, 6 July 2017, available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-40517715>, last visited: 25 August 2017.

²⁰ For example, Mr. Major has asserted that while he believes leaving the EU will lead to a reduction in British influence, he does not believe it will result in calamity. He says, “The UK has a robust political and economic structure. And so I do not share the view of those who anticipate an economic catastrophe upon leaving. What I do fear is that the UK will be less influential politically and will do less well economically than if she had remained in the European Union.” Cited in: Shaffer, L., ‘UK’s ex-PM John Major: Brexit will damage UK political influence as trade deals likely elusive’, *CNBC*, 20 April 2017, available at: <https://www.cnbc.com/2017/04/20/uks-ex-pm-john-major-brexit-will-damage-uk-political-influence-as-trade-deals-likely-elusive.html>, last visited: 25 August 2017.

²¹ Sawers, J., ‘Britain on its own will count for little on the world stage’, *Financial Times*, 20 June 2017, available at: <https://www.ft.com/content/1e11c6a0-54fe-11e7-80b6-9bfa4c1f83d2>, last visited: 25 August 2017.

²² This concern was eloquently articulated by Sir Winston Churchill shortly after the Second World War: “For four hundred years the foreign policy of England has been to oppose the strongest, most aggressive, most dominating Power on the Continent, and particularly to prevent the Low Countries falling into the hands of such a Power. ... Observe that the policy of England takes no account of which nation it is that seeks the overlordship of Europe. The question is not whether it is Spain, or the French Monarchy, or the French Empire, or the German Empire, or the Hitler régime. It has nothing to do with rulers or nations; it is concerned solely with whoever is the strongest or the potentially dominant tyrant.” See: Churchill, W., *The Second World War – Vol. 1: The Gathering Storm* (London: Guild Publishing, 2005 [1948]), pp. 186-187.

prime minister, has warned that Britain’s exit would allow Germany to “win the peace” in Europe, implying that it would gradually take control of the continent.²³

In addition to this pro-EU political caucus, an array of commentators from across the board have intervened – actively – in the discussion. According to *The Economist*, for example, in a suitably entitled commentary, ‘Britain’s decline and fall’, the UK “has not cut such a pathetic figure on the world stage since Suez”.²⁴ In another edition, “the country is on course for disaster” as the new “sick man of Europe”.²⁵ In an article – accompanied by a cartoon of a small cat looking into a mirror and seeing a mighty lion – in the *FT Magazine*, Simon Kuper asserted that “Britain today is like a cute little bonobo ape that thinks it’s a gorilla”.²⁶ Meanwhile, the commentator Rafael Behr, writing for *The Guardian*, claims that “viewed from Trump Tower, Britain sits in the bottom half of the first division of world players”. He goes on: “For decades Britain has struggled to get a comfortable sense of its scale relative to the rest of the world. We are about to find out how big – or small – we really are.”²⁷ In another, similarly themed piece, he claims that “humiliation” is the only route ahead, irrespective of the form:

The enactment of Brexit will complete an economic, diplomatic and strategic devaluation that is prefigured already in sterling’s post-referendum slide. Britain will be measurably smaller on the world stage. The reversal of Brexit, or its dilution into some pale simulation of the status quo, requires a plea in Brussels for more time and a fresh start. That will be hard to distinguish from a grovel.²⁸

The themes of “mediocrity” and “ignominy” manifest themselves over and over. Again in *The Guardian*, Simon Tilford, Deputy Director at the Centre for European Reform, declares:

Britain is heading for humiliation. The country’s already mediocre economic record is set to worsen further. It will be alienated from its closest allies – the rest of the EU – and have little international influence.²⁹

Speculation over the UK’s looming decline has also been heard overseas. *The Guardian* was quick to report comments from the Danish Finance Minister, Kristian Jensen, that leaving the EU would be “a disaster for the UK”. He jested, “There are two kinds of European nations. There are small nations and there are countries that have not yet realised they are small nations.”³⁰ Likewise, Jenni Russell takes this theme forward in *The New York Times*:

²³ See: Macrory, S., ‘Lord Heseltine: “Germany lost the war. Brexit hands them the chance to win the peace”’, *The House Magazine*, 24 March 2017, pp. 16-20. For a more general discussion of German power, see: Lever, P., *Berlin Rules: Europe and the German Way* (London: I. B. Taurus and Co. Ltd., 2017).

²⁴ Bagehot, ‘Britain’s decline and fall’, *The Economist*, 29 June 2017, available at: <https://www.economist.com/news/britain/21724395-country-has-not-cut-such-pathetic-figure-global-stage-suez-britains-decline>, last visited: 25 August 2017.

²⁵ See: ‘Britain faces up to Brexit’, *The Economist*, 22 July 2017, available at: <https://www.economist.com/news/leaders/21725314-long-government-stays-denial-about-brexit-drawbacks-country-course>, last visited: 25 August 2017; Buttonwood, ‘Britain: back to being the sick man of Europe?’, *The Economist*, 19 July 2017, available at: <https://www.economist.com/blogs/buttonwood/2017/07/1970s-show>, last visited: 25 August 2017. See also: Blanchflower, D., “‘Britain is fast becoming the sick man of Europe’ – experts debate Brexit data”, *The Guardian*, 24 July 2017, available at: <http://www.theguardian.com/business/2017/jul/24/britain-is-fast-becoming-the-sick-man-of-europe-experts-debate-brexit-data>, last visited: 25 August 2017.

²⁶ Kuper, S., ‘Brexit reveals Britain’s enduring flaws’, *FT Magazine*, 3 August 2017, available at: <https://www.ft.com/content/b3d62bcc-7713-11e7-90c0-90a9d1bc9691>, last visited: 25 August 2017.

²⁷ Behr, R., ‘May can think big all she likes. Britain’s about to find out just how small it is’, *The Guardian*, 17 January 2017, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/jan/17/theresa-may-britain-prime-minister-speech>, last visited: 25 August 2017.

²⁸ Behr, R., ‘Dunkirk reveals the spirit that has driven Brexit: humiliation’, *The Guardian*, 26 July 2017, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/jul/26/dunkirk-brexit-retreat-europe-britain-ec>, last visited: 25 August 2017.

²⁹ Tilford, S., ‘Britain’s complacency over Brexit will end in humiliation’, *The Guardian*, 2 May 2017, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/may/02/britain-complacency-brexit-humiliation-france-germany-eu-uk>, last visited: 25 August 2017. See also: Tilford, S., ‘The British and their exceptionalism’, *Centre for European Reform*, 3 May 2017, available at: <http://www.cer.eu/insights/british-and-their-exceptionalism>, last visited: 25 August 2017.

³⁰ Cited in: Boffey, D., ‘Brexit broadside: British officials bristle at Danish scorn’, *The Guardian*, 14 June 2017, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2017/jun/14/road-to-brexit-is-paved-with-amusement-danish-and-brave-faces-british>, last visited: 25 August 2017.

We are a tiny island, but we are – as the prime minister, Theresa May, and leading Brexiteers have frequently assured us – the world’s fifth largest economy. ... The trouble with that statistic is that it obscures all the weaknesses that lie beneath the surface. We don’t have the skills, the manufacturing base, the drive or the productivity we would need to take off as an independent nation. For years, Britain’s inadequacies have been compensated for by its membership in the European Union. Now, they are about to become painfully apparent.³¹

In the same newspaper, Ben Judah has focused on the cohesion of the UK itself, bringing declinism to its logical conclusion. He declares that leaving the EU will lead not only to a decline in British power, but also to the disintegration of the British union:

Brexit’s fantasy of revived greatness – “taking back control” – will achieve the opposite. England’s wish to withdraw from its union with Europe appears now to have made inevitable Scotland’s eventual withdrawal from its union with England. It has also placed in doubt the status of Northern Ireland, where a majority also voted against leaving the European Union.³²

And Michael Kimmelman engages in the most peculiar idea of them all: he tries to link Crossrail – the UK’s largest infrastructure project, linking east and west London – with UK withdrawal, arguing that it may mark the end of an “ambitious era”.³³

2.1 The poverty of declinism

Major powers often have a tendency to worry about their international stature: even the US, a global superpower, has not been immune from such introspection.³⁴ Paradoxically, this reflexive tendency may even be the hallmark of a *real* major power, without which it would be unable to correct or reinvent itself. It should be no surprise then that declinist narratives are not a new phenomenon in the UK. Britons have long been concerned about their country’s standing, in relation to both the European theatre and the wider world. Such concerns were evident during the turn of the last century when the British were facing stiff economic and geopolitical competition from Germany, Russia and the US.³⁵ They re-emerged for a while during the 1930s when the UK was confronted by the new totalitarian ideology of Nazi Germany; appeasement was based in part on an underlying misperception that Britain was too weak for a fight.³⁶ Declinism was also pronounced during the 1970s, when there really was a marked sense that the UK was tumbling

³¹ Russell, J., ‘No Dunkirk Spirit Can Save Britain From Brexit Defeat’, *The New York Times*, 28 July 2017, available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/07/28/opinion/dunkirk-christopher-nolan-brexit.html>, last visited: 25 August 2017.

³² Judah, B., ‘England’s Last Gasp of Empire’, *The New York Times*, 12 July 2016, available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/13/opinion/englands-last-gasp-of-empire.html>, last visited: 25 August 2017.

³³ Kimmelman, M., ‘London’s New Subway Symbolized the Future. Then came Brexit’, *The New York Times*, 31 July 2017, available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/07/31/world/europe/london-crossrail-uk-brexit.html>, last visited: 25 August 2017.

³⁴ Three periods of American decline have been witnessed over the past few decades: first, in the 1980s, when some speculated that Japan could overtake the US economically; again after the 2007–2009 financial crisis; and again in recent months, coinciding with the election of President Donald Trump. For the 1980s, see: Vogel, E., *Japan as Number 1: Lessons for America* (New York City: Harper Colophon, 1979). For the late 2000s and early 2010s, see: Zakaria, F., *The Post-American World* (New York City: W. W. Norton and Company, Inc., 2009); Holmes, K. R., ‘What Could Cause America’s Decline?’, *The Heritage Foundation*, 10 March 2011, available at: <http://www.heritage.org/political-process/commentary/what-could-cause-americas-decline/>, last visited: 25 August 2017; Layne, C., ‘Graceful Decline’, *The American Conservative*, 1 May 2010, available at: <http://www.theamericanconservative.com/articles/graceful-decline/>, last visited: 25 August 2017; Rachman, G., ‘Think Again: American Decline’, *Foreign Policy*, 3 January 2011, available at: <http://foreignpolicy.com/2011/01/03/think-again-american-decline/>, last visited: 25 August 2017; Kupchan, C., ‘The Decline of the West: Why America Must Prepare for the End of Dominance’, *The Atlantic*, 20 March 2012, available at: <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2012/03/the-decline-of-the-west-why-america-must-prepare-for-the-end-of-dominance/254779/>, last visited: 25 August 2017. For the contemporary period, see: Layne, C., ‘Is the United States in decline?’, *The American Conservative*, 8 August 2017, available at: <http://www.theamericanconservative.com/articles/is-the-united-states-in-decline/>, last visited: 25 August 2017;

³⁵ For two accounts of the then Secretary of State for the Colonies Joseph Chamberlain’s description of the UK as a “weary Titan”, see: Friedberg, A. L., *The Weary Titan: Britain and the Experience of Relative Decline, 1895–1905* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1988), and Bell, D., *The Idea of Greater Britain: Empire and the Future of World Order, 1860–1900* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2007).

³⁶ Reynolds, D., *Britannia Overruled: British Policy and World Power in the 20th Century* (London: Pearson Education, Ltd., 2000), pp. 108–136.

down the economic league tables, particularly in relation to its large continental neighbours, namely West Germany and France. As Sir Nicholas Henderson’s now infamous valedictory despatch as Ambassador to France lamented:

In the immediate aftermath of the War we continued to rank as one of the great powers, admittedly a long way behind the US and USSR but nevertheless still at the same table as them. ... I myself was able to observe Churchill, Attlee and Bevan dealing on equal terms with Stalin and Truman at the Potsdam Conference when no German or Frenchman was present. ... It is our decline since then in relation to our European partners that has been so marked, so that today we are not only no longer a world power, but we are not in the first rank even as a European one...We are scarcely in the same economic league as the Germans or French. We talk of ourselves without shame as being one of the less prosperous countries of Europe.³⁷

Declinism also broke out during the economic restructuring in the late 1980s and early 1990s, as well as during the financial crisis (2008–2009), when analysts worried about Britain’s future financial prospects.³⁸ And, with the UK’s decision to leave the EU, the affliction has re-emerged.

The problem with declinist interventions is that, despite their claim to objectivity and impartiality, they sometimes – indeed, frequently – reveal another agenda. It is in this sense that there are three sides to the declinist triangle. While each can stand in relative isolation to the other, all three forms can come together to reinforce one another, often providing a skewed or even false perspective (see: Box 1).

Box 1: Forms of declinist narrative

Form of declinism	Characteristics
Descriptive	More descriptive and analytical, but usually articulated with an element of lament, i.e., concern that a country is slipping internationally.
Speculative	More speculative, looking at current trends or statistics and extrapolating them into the future, frequently with certainty.
Deceptive	More deceptive, inflating current trends or statistics for some form of political purpose, celebrating decline or spreading mistruths to instil fear and trepidation among sectors of the population.

The first form of declinism is more descriptive and analytical, and therefore tends towards impartiality and objectivity. It is largely contemporary or historical analysis, focusing on decline that is perceived to be under way or has already occurred. The declinist narratives during the 1890s and 1970s fall into this category: owing to the industrialisation of Britain’s peers in the 1890s and 1900s and decolonisation and deindustrialisation during the 1970s, the UK *was* in relative decline.

³⁷ Henderson, N., ‘Britain’s decline; its causes and consequences’, *Diplomatic Report 129/97* (London: Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 1979).

³⁸ See, for example: Warner, J., ‘Harsh truths about the decline of Britain’, *The Daily Telegraph*, 31 October 2013, available at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/finance/economics/10417838/Harsh-truths-about-the-decline-of-Britain.html>, last visited: 25 August 2017.

The second form of declinist discourse is more problematic: it can contain a kernel of truth, but mostly inflates that kernel to such an extent that the holistic picture is lost. Thus, this speculative declinism is frequently “Malthusian”: it is based on trendlines or conjecture and it foresees their continuation with confidence and certainty, failing to account for political will and future phenomena or capabilities that might intercede to prevent decline, and from different angles and vectors.³⁹ To some extent, the declinism of the 1970s was also speculative: those mesmerised by the prospect could not foresee the economic restructuring of the 1980s and 1990s, which led to the UK’s post-Cold War economic boom.

Speculative declinism has a long historical lineage. For example, during a parliamentary debate on 17th March 1778, the Under-Secretary of State for War, Charles Jenkinson, rose to utter the following words:

The great military powers in the interior parts of Europe, who have amassed together their great treasures, and have modelled their subjects into great armies, will in the next and succeeding period of time, become the predominant powers.⁴⁰

This is clearly speculation, even if made ostensibly in good faith. Mr. Jenkinson took his particular period as a vantage point and extrapolated certain trends in a Malthusian way, assuming them to be certainties, over which his country had no political influence, let alone control. Of course, from his particular vantage point, his forecast may have seemed logical: the UK was fighting for its American colonial empire, a conflict into which the French were starting to intervene directly. The country was encircled on all flanks by hostile forces, jealous of Britain’s financial wherewithal and smarting from their defeat at London’s hands during the Seven Years’ War.⁴¹ To Mr. Jenkinson, a potential additional layer of opponents further east in continental Europe – Austria, Prussia and Russia – could only endanger Britain further still.

This is where the problems emerge. What the Under-Secretary of State for War could not see were the political, geopolitical and technological factors that would impede the rise of those powers, and contribute to the continued prevalence of the UK. Far from being overwhelmed by the “great military powers in the interior parts of Europe”, Britain’s “maritime revolution”, already well under way, would not only furnish London with the means to prevent enemies from using the ocean, but it would also lead to the emergence of a fiscal-military state for waging war.⁴² Combined with the relatively open institutions of the British state and civil society, this set the stage for British scientists, engineers, urban planners and liberal theorists to unleash countless technological marvels during the nineteenth century. The resulting Industrial Revolution gave the nation the means not only to gain an enormous lead over all its European rivals, but also to move beyond them and emerge as the first truly global power. Indeed, for more than a century, the nation served as the harbinger for the modern age.⁴³

³⁹ “Malthusianism” comes from Thomas Malthus, the late eighteenth-century demographer who predicted overpopulation and then natural correction, i.e., starvation, in the British Isles. He could not foresee the coming improvements to agricultural production, which would dramatically increase the food yield from existing farmland. “Malthusianism” has since referred to those who advocate outcomes based not on absolute certainties, but conjecture. For an overview, see: ‘Malthus, the false prophet’, *The Economist*, 15 May 2008, available at: <http://www.economist.com/node/11374623>, last visited: 25 August 2017.

⁴⁰ Cited in: Simms, B., *Three Victories and a Defeat: The Rise and Fall of the First British Empire, 1714-1783* (London: Penguin, 2007), p. 635.

⁴¹ For an excellent geopolitical account of the period, see: Simms, *Three Victories and a Defeat*, pp. 422-462.

⁴² See: Snow, D., *Empire of the Seas: How the Navy Forged the Modern World*, BBC2, January 2010, available at:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b00q3l9k/episodes/guide>, last visited: 25 August 2017. For the book of the same name, see: Lavery, B., *Empire of the Seas: How the Navy Forged the Modern World* (London: Conway, 2009).

⁴³ See, for example, Dugan, S. and Dugan, D., *The Day the World Took Off* (London: Channel 4, 2000); Allen, R. C., *Global Economic History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Ferguson, N., *Empire: How Britain Made the Modern World* (London: Allen Lane, 2003).

The final form of declinism is more insidious. As with those declinist narratives built on speculation, deceptive declinism can also be based on strategic trends. This form of declinism frequently masquerades as descriptive and objective, but is often articulated to serve some kind of political purpose. It was highly apparent in the 1930s, 1980s and 1990s, deeply wound up in the politics of the day.⁴⁴ More recently, such tactics have been utilised by those who remain unconvinced that leaving the EU can actually succeed, ostensibly in an attempt to encourage the general public into thinking either that withdrawal will fail, or that the UK’s post-EU future will be so disadvantageous that it should be reconsidered.⁴⁵ Four tactics are often apparent in such discourse:

1. **“Decentring”** includes those attempts to literally “decentre” the UK. With this tactic, the UK is constructed as a supplemental object to the referential subject, namely the EU, over which London has – allegedly – no influence or control.
2. **“Decoupling”** involves the discursive separation of the EU from the wider Euro-Atlantic security order, apparently to de-emphasise the UK’s unique role as a military and nuclear power, which – as a custodian of European security – has long played a leading role, alongside the US, in helping to provide the very environment that was required for European integration to begin and prosper.
3. **“Discrediting”** encompasses acts to literally smear the UK in relation to the EU, with the former disparaged as “hysterical”, “closed”, “illiberal” and “intolerant” since the EU referendum, while the latter is revered as “pragmatic”, “open”, “liberal” and “tolerant”.⁴⁶
4. **“Deflecting”** consists of attempts to ignore or disengage with the arguments made by those supportive of leaving the EU, while simply asserting, repetitively, that withdrawal will lead to economic catastrophe or disaster, or that the UK will inevitably decline.

The objective of such tactics appears to be to generate perceptions of hopelessness on the part of the UK, discouraging British efforts to seize the initiative or take control of events. The real agenda, then, is not impartial analysis, but rather to prevent or instigate a particular course of political action or outcome, namely to shake – as those opposed to UK withdrawal see it – the British people back to their senses.

To be fair, as with their speculative counterparts, deceptive declinists’ claims can contain a kernel of truth. But such kernels are deliberately exaggerated for political effect. In the shorter term, the decision to leave the EU, for example, will almost certainly result in Britain’s “decline”, but only in an EU context. After all, as it formally withdraws from the institutional structures of the organisation, the process may become increasingly acrimonious, enabling Germany – the largest continental state – and others to shape the EU more readily in relation to their own national

⁴⁴ For a good overview, see: Grant, W., ‘What happened to British decline?’, *SPEI Comment*, 16 October 2014, available at: <http://speri.dept.shef.ac.uk/2014/10/16/happened-british-decline/>, last visited: 25 August 2017; Tomlinson, J., ‘Thrice Denied: “Declinism” as a Recurrent Theme in British History in the Long Twentieth Century’, *Twentieth Century British History* 20:2 (2009); and English, R. and Kenny, M., ‘Public intellectuals and the question of British decline’, *British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 3:3 (2001).

⁴⁵ In that sense, such assertions are no better than those of some so-called “Brexiters” or “Leavers”, who imply that unwinding more than 40 years of integration will be relatively easy, or that the EU will simply acquiesce to every British demand.

⁴⁶ This tactic has been used before, albeit in a different context. Contrast it with the appeasers’ tactics of constructing mainland Europe as “foreign”, “strange” or “distant”, and therefore irrelevant, during the 1930s. For example, Neville Chamberlain infamously described the crisis in Czechoslovakia on the radio on 27 September 1938 as “a quarrel in a far away country between people of whom we know nothing”, when in fact the British had long taken a keen interest in European affairs, because they knew of the consequences of not doing so.

preferences.⁴⁷ However, while this may mean a reduction of British influence in the EU, it does not necessarily translate into decline *per se*: insofar as the “EU” and “Europe” are *not* coterminous; other platforms and institutions exist (or could exist) for the UK to continue to influence and shape the future of its own neighbourhood.⁴⁸

Although it will undoubtedly seek more global links after leaving the EU, the UK – as a European power and a custodian of the Euro-Atlantic order – will almost certainly have to remain heavily focused on the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) and various European bilateral and multilateral relationships.⁴⁹ It will also almost certainly seek to draw the EU closer to itself, through what the Prime Minister, Theresa May, has described as a “deep and special partnership”.⁵⁰ As the Secretary of State for Defence, Sir Michael Fallon, has reiterated, and on more than one occasion, “Although we are leaving the European Union, we remain committed to European security. This is our continent and we will keep on working to help keep it safe. We are not stepping away.”⁵¹ Indeed, London has already stated its intention to bolster NATO, and British defence ties have continued to deepen with countries like France, Sweden, Finland and the Baltic states.⁵²

If looked at from a longer-term perspective, the UK is almost certainly in decline. This does not mean, however, absolute decline, but rather *relative* decline: other countries, particularly in the Indo-Pacific region, are growing demographically and economically at a much faster pace than the UK. In terms of prosperity, they are simply catching up. But the same applies to *every* country in the Western world, including the United States (US), which has been the world’s dominant power for more than half a century.⁵³ Indeed, the EU, the other main area of economic production during the post-war period – alongside North America, Japan and the British Isles – has already declined substantially: when the UK joined the European Community in 1973, Europe accounted for just over 32% of global output, but accounts for 21.7% today, despite having grown to cover much of the European continent and incorporate a further 250 million people.⁵⁴ Indeed, PriceWaterhouseCoopers predicts that the EU’s output may decline further still by 2050, particularly as the UK leaves and if it fails to overcome population stagnation and decline in Germany and other parts of central and eastern Europe over the next decade.⁵⁵ All Western

⁴⁷ See: Lever, P., *Berlin Rules: Europe and the German Way* (London: I. B. Taurus and Co. Ltd., 2017); and Kundnani, H., ‘Germany’s Neo-Bismarckian Strategy’, *German Marshall Fund of the United States*, 27 September 2016, available at:

<http://www.gmfus.org/blog/2016/09/27/germany%E2%80%99s-neo-bismarckian-strategy>, last visited 25 August 2017.

⁴⁸ See: Simon, L., ‘Britain and the fate of the Europe we know’, *War on the Rocks*, 24 October 2016, <https://warontherocks.com/2016/10/britain-and-the-fate-of-the-europe-we-know/>, last visited: 25 August 2017; Rogers, J. and Romanovs, U., ‘Brexit: military implications for the Baltic states’, in Spruds, A. and Potjomkina, D., *Coping with Complexity in the Euro-Atlantic Community and Beyond* (Riga: Latvian Institute of International Affairs, 2016); Simms, B., ‘The world after Brexit’, *The New Statesman*, 1 March 2017, available at: <http://www.newstatesman.com/world/europe/2017/03/world-after-brexit>, last visited: 25 August 2017.

⁴⁹ This is one of the key points made in a historical context by Brendan Simms in his book *Britain’s Europe*. The UK cannot afford to be a global power if its neighbourhood is either dominated by hostile powers or disorderly. See: Simms, B., *Britain’s Europe: A Thousand Years of Conflict and Cooperation* (London: Allen Lane, 2016).

⁵⁰ ‘Brexit: The UK’s letter triggering Article 50’, *BBC News*, 29 March 2017, available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-39431070>, last visited: 25 August 2017.

⁵¹ Cited in: Barnes, J. E., ‘UK to Send Formidable Force to Eastern Europe’ *The Wall Street Journal*, 26 October 2016, available at: <https://www.wsj.com/articles/u-k-to-send-formidable-force-to-eastern-europe-1477440062>, last visited: 25 August 2017. See also: Fallon, M., ‘Defence Secretary Speaks at Université d’été, Paris’, *Gov.uk*, 5 September 2016, available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/defence-secretary-speaks-at-universite-dete-paris>, last visited: 25 August 2017; ‘UK minister Fallon: “Defense is for NATO and not the EU”’, *Deutsche Welle*, 18 February 2017, available at: <http://www.dw.com/en/uk-minister-fallon-defense-is-for-nato-and-not-the-eu/a-37611182>, last visited: 25 August 2017.

⁵² For a short analysis, see: Benbow, T., ‘Looking ahead to 2017: “Brexit” and Britain’s role in the world’, *Defence in Depth*, 13 January 2017, available at: <https://defenceindepth.co/2017/01/13/looking-ahead-to-2017-brexit-and-britains-role-in-the-world/>, last visited 25 August 2017.

⁵³ See, for example: Layne, C., ‘Is the United States in Decline?’, *The American Conservative*, 8 August 2017, available at: <http://www.theamericanconservative.com/articles/is-the-united-states-in-decline/>, last visited: 25 August 2017; Nye, J., *Is the American Century Over?* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2015).

⁵⁴ See: ‘GDP (current US\$) (1973 and 2016) – World’, *World Bank*, 2017, available at: <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.CD?contextual-aggregate&end=2016&start=1973>, last visited: 25 August 2017; ‘GDP (current US\$) (1973 and 2016) – European Union’, *World Bank*, 2017, available at: <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.CD?contextual-aggregate&end=2016&locations=EU&start=1973>, last visited: 25 August 2017.

⁵⁵ Hawksworth, J., et. al., *The Long View: How will the global economic order change by 2050?* (London: PriceWaterhouseCooper, 2017), p. 4.

powers are therefore in relative economic decline, but they have all been declining since the mid-twentieth century, when they reached their apex.⁵⁶

So opinions as to whether the UK will decline in the way alleged by many deceptive declinists – primarily those whose sole objective is to remain inside the EU – are at this moment largely based on nothing but speculation. For example, in relation to claims that withdrawal from the EU will lead to the breakdown of the Acts of Union, it is of course correct that both Scotland and Northern Ireland voted “Remain” in the EU referendum, but it does not automatically follow that either will leave the UK. In fact, since the EU referendum, although the nationalist cause in Scotland is far from dead, it has taken a heavy knock, with the support for separation down and the Scottish National Party having lost a third of its seats in the June 2017 snap election.⁵⁷ Equally, it has retreated in the face of significant advances by the Conservative and Unionist Party, which was thought only a few years ago to be a spent force in Scotland.⁵⁸ It is therefore unclear whether or not the UK will decline after it leaves the EU, let alone whether it will head for economic “disaster”, political “disintegration” or “national humiliation”.

Finally, to what extent decline even matters depends very much on political perspective and historical context. Indeed, as the historian Robert Tombs recently revealed, if looked at geopolitically, the contemporary narratives of decline – descriptive, speculative and deceptive – are problematic, especially in relation to the UK:

Britain is more secure from major external threat than for half a millennium. Taking a long view (say the last three centuries) it remains what it always has been – one of the half-dozen or so strongest states in the world, and one of the most global in its attachments, its vision, and its trade. Within this leading group of states, Britain has not declined but has actually advanced, being now more powerful than its ancient rivals France, Germany and Russia.⁵⁹

Simply put, while the UK may have declined from its lofty heights during the Victorian and Edwardian ages, by the end of the Cold War, the country achieved something of a temporary respite from the acute geopolitical challenges it once faced. Spain and France, once dangerous enemies, have become increasingly dependent on the UK from a strategic and military standpoint.⁶⁰ Germany and Japan, once hijacked by murderous and disruptive regimes, have been systematically transformed by the UK and US into constitutional states, and locked down into regional alliances and structures. And the Soviet Union, after threatening its enemies either with deportation to the Siberian wastes or nuclear Armageddon, eventually buckled and shrivelled away in its ideological defeat. The rise of new threats to the UK and its allies in the 1990s and 2000s – such as rogue states, Islamist extremism and international terrorism – seemed less severe,

⁵⁶ This is shown aptly by *The Economist's* map depicting the world's shifting centre of gravity, See: 'The world's shifting centre of gravity', *The Economist*, 28 June 2012, available at: <https://www.economist.com/blogs/graphicdetail/2012/06/daily-chart-19>, last visited: 25 August 2017.

⁵⁷ Generally, since the referendum on Scottish independence from the UK in 2014, support for separation has experienced a moderate decline. For a good discussion, see: Massie, A., 'The battle for Scottish independence is far from over', *The Spectator*, 11 August 2017, available at: <https://blogs.spectator.co.uk/2017/08/the-battle-for-scottish-independence-is-far-from-over/>, last visited: 25 August 2017; Daisley, S., 'Scottish nationalism is having a nervous breakdown', *The Spectator*, 10 August 2017, available at: <https://blogs.spectator.co.uk/2017/08/scottish-nationalism-is-having-a-nervous-breakdown/>, last visited: 25 August 2017.

⁵⁸ See: 'General election 2017: SNP lose a third of seats amid Tory surge', *BBC News*, 9 June 2017, available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-scotland-politics-40192707>, last visited: 25 August 2017; Wright, K., 'How shifts in Scottish public opinion helped the Conservatives reverse their long-term decline', *British Politics and Policy*, 26 July 2017, available at: <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/politicsandpolicy/scottish-public-opinion-conservatives-ge2017/>, last visited: 25 August 2017.

⁵⁹ Tombs, R., 'The myth of Britain's decline', *The Spectator*, 8 July 2017, available at: <https://www.spectator.co.uk/2017/07/the-myth-of-britains-decline/>, last visited: 25 August 2017.

⁶⁰ See: Waterfield, B., 'Macron leaks reveal Britain beats Germany for defence', *The Times*, 2 August 2017, available at: <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/macron-leaks-reveal-britain-beats-germany-for-defence-t7msdrws6>, last visited: 25 August 2017.

requiring a new kind of focus and new means. Whether the so-called “old fashioned” geopolitical challenges are now re-emerging is an open question: the rise of China and re-emergence of a prickly, belligerent and revisionist Russia – albeit one living off political will, rather than strong capabilities – seems at least to complicate Britain’s post-Cold War strategic assumptions.⁶¹

⁶¹ See, for example: Foxall, A., ‘Putin will never restore Russia’s greatness’, *CapX*, 8 December 2016, available at: <https://capx.co/putin-will-never-restore-russias-greatness/>, last visited: 25 August 2017; Sherr, J., *Hard Diplomacy and Soft Coercion: Russia’s Influence Abroad* (London: Chatham House, 2013).

3. The foundations of British power

The Audit of Geopolitical Capability is predicated on seven different categories of geopolitical capability, including: “geographic integration”, “demographic condition”, “economic clout”, “technological prowess”, “diplomatic leverage”, “military strength”, and “cultural prowess” (see Appendix A). These categories each include one critical and four supporting indicators, based in total on 59 components. Together, their sum provides the total geopolitical capability for each country, not least the UK.

3.1 The geographic integration of the UK



According to the Audit of Geopolitical Capability, the UK has a very robust and established central government and very low levels of corruption by international standards. This provides the country with a degree of stability and the systems to transform national capabilities into national power and project them around and beyond the British Isles. The country – an island of just 243,610 square kilometres – is geographically the smallest major power,⁶² but has been gradually developed into one of the most integrated countries in the world, with an intricate lattice of

⁶² See: ‘Area’, *CIA World Factbook*, 2017, available at: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/rankorder/2147rank.html>, last visited: 25 August 2017.

communication networks, such as railways and roads, with extremely high levels of population density and urbanisation.⁶³ Likewise, the UK has one of the world’s largest merchant marines; if the vessels registered with its overseas territories – particularly Bermuda and the Cayman Islands – are taken into account, it would be 100% larger still.⁶⁴ It also has one of the highest levels of air transport among the major powers: Heathrow is the world’s fourth busiest international airport, while London has the world’s largest and busiest city airport system, comprised of six different airports of various sizes (Heathrow, Gatwick, Stansted, Luton, Southend and City airports), handling more than 160 million passengers per year.⁶⁵

Meanwhile the country’s “overseas extension”, assembled over the past five centuries as British navigators, traders and conquerors fanned out across the planet, is the largest of any country, albeit not too dissimilar from that of France.⁶⁶ Today, even though the sun has long set on the British Empire, the geographic position of the UK and its overseas territories means it still very much has a global geographic footprint. As Nicholas Spykman put it:

The configuration of the European coastline and the position of England and Scotland have given Britain a strategic location of extraordinary importance. ... The Strait of Dover, less than thirty miles wide, and the English Channel can be controlled from a number of magnificent harbours in the south of England. As long as Great Britain can maintain naval supremacy in the North Sea and close the Channel between Plymouth and Brest she can blockade the north of Europe. Control of the Strait of Gibraltar, the Suez Canal, and the Red Sea means control of the entrance and exit of the European Mediterranean to the Atlantic and the Indian oceans. Mastery of the Bay of Biscay and continued possession of the Mediterranean bases [especially Gibraltar and the Sovereign Bases on Cyprus] assures Great Britain control of all the routes to southern Europe. The international commerce of both the northern and southern part of the continent must pass British-controlled portals before it can reach the open oceans and free access to the trade routes of the world.⁶⁷

In addition to those around Europe, many of the UK’s overseas territories are in close proximity to several of the world’s most important “maritime chokepoints”, providing Britain with – in the words of Admiral Sir Jackie Fisher – the “keys” to potentially “lock” access to almost every maritime and littoral theatre, ultimately reaching into the Gulf and the Middle East, as well as the South Atlantic and the wider Indo-Pacific.⁶⁸ From its military facilities on the Falkland Islands – described as a “strategic gateway” to the Antarctic – Britain can loom over the Strait of Magellan and Cape Horn, which connect the Pacific and Atlantic oceans.⁶⁹ Indeed, with additional airfields

⁶³ See: ‘United Kingdom’, *CIA World Factbook*, 2009, available at: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/uk.html>, last visited: 29 August 2017.

⁶⁴ See: ‘World fleet registered vessels (FLE05)’, *Gov.uk*, 25 September 2013 (updated 29 March 2017), available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/fle05-world-fleet-registered-vessels>, last visited: 25 August 2017.

⁶⁵ See: ‘Air transport, registered carrier departures worldwide’, *World Bank*, 2016, available at: <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/IS.AIR.DPRT?end=2016&locations=US-GB-DE-FR-CN-JP-IN-RU&start=2016&view=bar>, last visited: 25 August 2017. It is worth pointing out that, if the registered tonnage of the Cayman Islands were taken into account, the UK’s merchant marine would be even larger.

⁶⁶ See: ‘Geographic Extension - United Kingdom’, *Google Maps*, available at: <http://www.google.com/maps/d/viewer?mid=1EynAGRnQngchBt0OWbXJl47Ac&ll=3.928901586309611%2C-108.64140129999998&z=3>, last visited: 25 August 2017; ‘Geographic Extension - France’, *Google Maps*, available at: <http://www.google.com/maps/d/viewer?mid=1goaRgyDi6VI-97Wi3q7e8XNe3Lo&ll=6.377126321561018%2C0&z=1>, last visited: 25 August 2017.

⁶⁷ See: Spykman, N., *America’s Strategy in World Politics: The United States and the Balance of Power* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 2007 [1942]), p. 98.

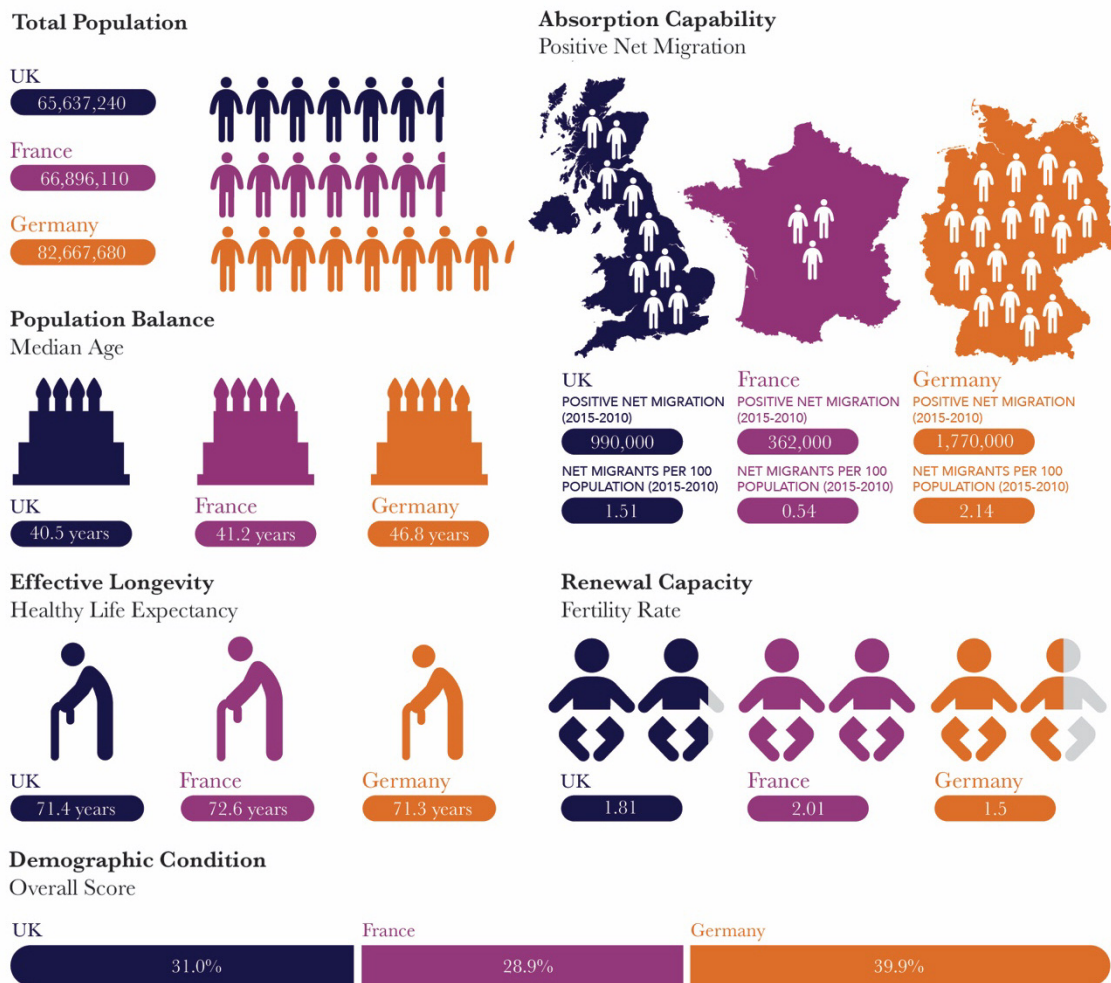
⁶⁸ As Admiral Sir Jackie Fisher put it in 1904: ‘Five keys to lock up the world! ... Singapore. The Cape. Alexandria. Gibraltar. Dover. These five keys belong to England.’ If we exchange Alexandria for the Sovereign Base Areas on Cyprus, the UK still has direct or indirect influence over all of these keys with the exception of the Cape of Good Hope in Southern Africa. Cited in: Friedberg, A., *The Weary Titan: Britain and the Experience of Relative Decline, 1895-1905* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1988), p. 200.

⁶⁹ For a good overview of the Falklands, see: Dodds, K., ‘The Falkland Islands as a “Strategic Gateway”: Britain and the South Atlantic Overseas Territories’, *The RUSI Journal* 157:6 (2012).

on the islands of Ascension and St. Helena and a nuclear submarine and warship on frequent patrol, the UK has the means to become so entrenched in the South Atlantic that it might be considered a “British lake”.⁷⁰ Meanwhile, an “array” of territories, including the stronghold of Gibraltar, the Sovereign Bases on Cyprus, and Diego Garcia in British Indian Ocean Territory, allow the UK (and its allies) to hover over the gateways to the Mediterranean and Black Seas, as well as, respectively, the Bab-el-Mandeb and the Straits of Hormuz and Malacca.⁷¹ These “portals” straddle the most important maritime communication lines in the world, routes – with the industrialisation of the Asian littorals – that have continued to grow in significance.

3.2 The UK’s demographic condition

THE UK’S DEMOGRAPHIC CONDITION COMPARED TO ITS EUROPEAN PEERS



⁷⁰ Recall that HMS Conqueror’s presence in the South Atlantic during the Falklands conflict rapidly established – with the sinking of the General Belgrano – sea control over much of the area. With the cruiser sunk, Argentina never again contested British maritime dominance using naval assets. To extrapolate, recall that while the Royal Navy may lack the assets to permanently maintain “command of the sea” across the entire region, its access to nuclear attack submarines means it can control significant portions of it. Only the US and French navies may have an equal capability, but neither operate frequently in the region. For a wider discussion, see: Finlan, A., *The Royal Navy in the Falklands Conflict and the Gulf War: Culture and Strategy* (London: Frank Cass, 2004), pp. 33-64.

⁷¹ For an overview of this “array”, see: James Rogers, ‘European (British and French) geostrategy in the Indo-Pacific’, *Journal of the Indian Ocean Region* 9: 1 (2013), pp. 69-89. The vast military complex on Diego Garcia was built and maintained by the US – and remains accessible by the UK – while the air station at Akrotiri on Cyprus has been offered for use to other allies, like France. See: Framer, B., ‘Britain says French can use Cyprus RAF base for Syria strikes on Isis’, *The Daily Telegraph*, available at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/islamic-state/12011727/Britain-says-French-can-use-Cyprus-RAF-base-for-Syria-strikes-on-Isil.html>, last visited: 25 August 2017.

The UK has the second-smallest population among the major powers, and significantly smaller than the populations of China, India and the US, which – with between 323 million and 1.38 billion people – completely dwarf it.⁷² In relation to the major European powers – Russia, Germany and France – the UK fares much better. While its population is 50% smaller than Russia’s and 20% smaller than Germany’s, it is nonetheless more stable and balanced, with a lower median age, a higher fertility rate and a better healthy life expectancy rate.⁷³ The UK also has the capacity to receive significant numbers of migrants, having received more than any other major power bar the US and Germany in 2016. Taken together, population projections suggest that the population of the British homeland could continue to grow well into the twenty-first century, potentially reaching between 75 and 80 million citizens by 2050, meaning its population will be nearing the level of Germany’s.⁷⁴ Of course, such an increase in population is partly dependent on the continued economic ability and political willingness of the country to accommodate new migrants or to prevent an exodus of population, which could result from some form of economic dislocation or stagnation.

3.3 Britain’s economic clout

According to the audit, in terms of “economic clout”, the UK ranks fifth, significantly behind the US, China and Japan, and marginally behind Germany, which is often described as the leading European economy. Britain has the fifth largest national output – GDP (nominal) – in the world and holds the fourth largest net quantity of world wealth, after the US, Japan and China, and more than US\$1.7 trillion more than Germany and US\$2.25 trillion more than France.⁷⁵ Importantly, while the economy of the UK has only the fifth largest economic yield of the major powers, it includes important additional capabilities that amplify and maintain its global position.

One of these is the capacity and reach of London’s two financial districts: the City of London and Canary Wharf. According to data from the Globalization and World Cities Research Network at the University of Loughborough, London, along with New York City, is regarded as an “Alpha++ World City”, i.e., a conglomeration that sits – on a truly pervasive scale – at the apex of the global financial system.⁷⁶ Together, these two vast entwined urban areas (“NYLON”) act as centres of expertise and services, as well as “command and control”, for the global economy.⁷⁷ Alone, London has a degree of financial “centrality” over 27% greater than that of Paris, and nearly 100% greater than that of Frankfurt, the two cities commonly referred to as the British capital’s main EU

⁷² See: ‘Migration’, ‘World Population Prospects 2017’, *United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs Population Division*, 2017, available at: <http://esa.un.org/unpd/wpp/DataQuery/>, last visited: 25 August 2017.

⁷³ See: ‘United Kingdom’, *CIA World Factbook*, 2016, available at: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/uk.html>, last visited: 29 August 2017; ‘Total Fertility Rate’, *CIA World Factbook*, 2016, available at: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/resources/the-world-factbook/rankorder/2127rank.html>, last visited: 29 August 2017; See: ‘Healthy life expectancy rate at birth (years), 2000–2015: Both sexes: 2015’, *World Health Organization*, 2015, available at: http://gamapserver.who.int/gho/interactive_charts/mbd/hale_1/atlas.html, last visited: 25 August 2017.

⁷⁴ See: ‘Migration’, ‘World Population Prospects 2017’, *United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs Population Division*, 2017, available at: <http://esa.un.org/unpd/wpp/DataQuery/>, last visited: 25 August 2017. See also: ‘Statistical Bulletin: National Population Projections: 2014-based Statistical Bulletin’, *Office for National Statistics*, 29 October 2015, available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationprojections/bulletins/nationalpopulationprojections/2015-10-29>, last visited: 25 August 2017.

⁷⁵ Research Institute, ‘Global Wealth Databook 2016’, *Credit Suisse* (2016), available at: <http://publications.credit-suisse.com/tasks/render/file/index.cfm?fileid=AD6F2B43-B17B-345E-E20A1A254A3E24A3>, last visited: 25 August 2017, p. 22 and ‘GDP (current US\$)’, *World Bank*, 2017, available at: <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.CD?end=2016&locations=GB-US-FR-DE-IN-RU-JP-CN&start=2016&view=bar>, last visited: 25 August 2017.

⁷⁶ ‘The World According to GaWC 2016’, *Globalization and World Cities Research Network*, 2016, available at: <http://www.lboro.ac.uk/gawc/world2016t.html>, last visited: 29 August 2017.

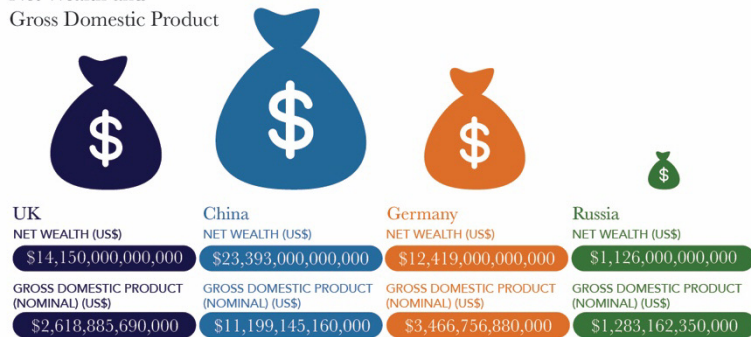
⁷⁷ London comes out as the leading global city in the Mori Memorial Foundation’s ‘Global Power City Index’ and Z/Yen Partners and the China Development Institute’s ‘Global Financial Centres Index’. See: ‘Global Power City Index 2016’, *Mori Memorial Foundation*, available at: <http://mori-memorial-foundation.or.jp/english/ius2/gpci2/index.shtml>, last visited: 29 August 2017; ‘The Global Financial Centres Index 20’, *Z/Yen Partners and China Development Institute* (March 2017), available at: http://www.longfinance.net/images/gfci/gfci_21.pdf, last visited: 29 August 2017.

rivals.⁷⁸ Consequently, it should never be forgotten just how much London, with its central time zone (between the North American and Asian markets) and ability to provide elite international services, dominates – alongside New York City – the global financial system. Both cities have such a preponderant lead over their European rivals that it would be very difficult, though of course not impossible, to dislodge them from their global pedestals. And it is not just London: the UK has a number of other world cities – such as Manchester, Edinburgh and Birmingham – that play an important role in the global economy. Indeed, the combined financial “centrality” of Britain’s world cities is the second largest on Earth, only exceeded – and greatly – by that of the US. Eventually, the UK may also be overtaken by China, which has been rapidly catching up: its industrialisation has propelled its major cities into major regional and even global centres for financial transaction and exchange.

THE UK’S ECONOMIC CLOUT IN COMPARISON WITH CHINA, GERMANY AND RUSSIA

Economic Yield

Net Wealth and Gross Domestic Product



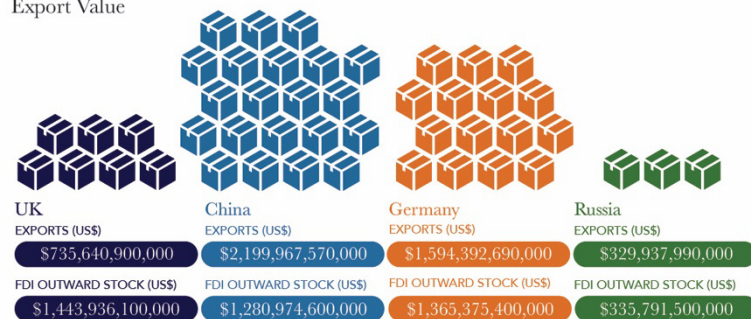
Financial Control

World Cities (Total Connectivity)



Economic Structuration

Export Value



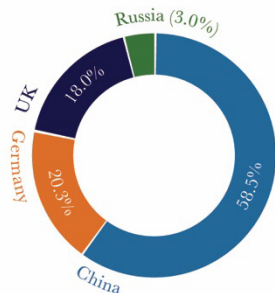
Business Environment

Ease of Doing Business (Score)



Economic Clout

Overall Score



Corporate Size

Forbes 2000 Index



⁷⁸ Based on figures in: Taylor, P. J., et. al., *Global Urban Analysis: Survey of Cities in Globalisation* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011).

At the same time, and perhaps relatedly, the UK does well with a number of other economic indicators, such as the number of Forbes 2000 companies it hosts. Although it is some way behind the US, Japan and China, it has more in total (and in the Top 500) than either France or Germany. In fact, the UK hosts over 54% more Forbes 2000 companies than France and over 78% more than Germany.⁷⁹ This should be no surprise: the UK scores particularly well in relation to how easy it is to do business in the country. Britain ranks above every other major power: its national institutions have been heavily liberalised since the 1980s and geared towards supporting business activity.⁸⁰ This, in turn, no doubt contributes to the country’s high degree of “economic structuration”: the UK is the fifth largest exporter of goods and services and the second largest direct foreign investor, slightly ahead of Japan and significantly ahead of China or its main European rivals.⁸¹

3.4 UK technological prowess

It should go without saying that the UK has been, for at least the past three centuries, a major centre for the development of new science and technology. It had an important role during the Enlightenment and in the development of the scientific method during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and propelled humanity into the agricultural and industrial revolutions in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.⁸² The nation was also at the forefront of some of the most astounding nuclear, biological and computer breakthroughs of the post-war era, from the world’s first commercial nuclear power plant in Calder Hall and the World Wide Web, to the first model of DNA and the creation of “Dolly” the sheep – the first cloned animal. The fact that Britain holds more Nobel Prizes than any other country except the US is indicative of its historical contributions to human advancement and development.⁸³ According to the Audit of Geopolitical Capability, Britain remains a hotbed of technological research, development and activity: the country has an excellent “knowledge base”, particularly at the tertiary level. Britain has more universities in the Top 10, Top 100 and Top 200 than any other country except the US.⁸⁴ In relation to the Education index, the UK takes third place, behind Germany and the US, which is an admirable performance, even if there have been concerns about the output from the British secondary educational system.⁸⁵

Regarding research spending, the UK is not a good performer: it has the second lowest research and development spending of all the major powers.⁸⁶ Only Russia – with an economy over 50% smaller than Britain’s – fares worse in terms of total spending, and only marginally. As a percentage of GDP spent on research and development, the UK ranks above only Russia and India – a shameful result. Meanwhile, South Korea – although not included in the audit, but

⁷⁹ Indeed, the UK’s count could be considered larger still, not least as Royal Dutch Shell and Unilever are listed exclusively as Dutch companies, even though they are British-Dutch, while Bermuda, a UK overseas territory, hosts a further nine companies. See: ‘The World’s Biggest Public Companies’, *Forbes*, available at: <http://www.forbes.com/global2000/list/>, last visited: 29 August 2017.

⁸⁰ See: ‘Doing Business – Economy Rankings’, *World Bank*, 2017, available at: <http://www.doingbusiness.org/rankings>, last visited: 18 August 2017.

⁸¹ See: ‘Exports of goods and services (current US\$)’, *World Bank*, available at: <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NE.EXP.GNFS.CD?end=2016&locations=GB-DE-FR-JP-US-CN-RU-IN&start=2016&view=bar>, last visited: 29 August 2017; ‘World Investment Report 2017: Annex Tables – Annex 02’, *United Nations Conference On Trade and Development*, available at: <http://unctad.org/en/Pages/DIAE/World%20Investment%20Report/Annex-Tables.aspx>, last visited: 29 August 2017.

⁸² See: Diamond, J., *Guns, Germs and Steel* (New York City: W. W. Norton, 1997); Dugan, S. and Dugan, D., *The Day the World Took Off*.

⁸³ See: ‘Nobel Laureates and Research Affiliations’, *Nobel Foundation*, 2016, available at: http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/lists/universities.html, last visited: 29 August 2017.

⁸⁴ See: ‘World University Rankings 2016–2017’, *Times Higher Education*.

⁸⁵ See: ‘Human Development Data (1990–2015): Education Index’, *UN Development Reports*, available at: <http://hdr.undp.org/en/data#>, last visited: 29 August 2017. For concerns about the UK school system, see: Groom, B., ‘Businesses warn UK schools over growing skills gap’, *Financial Times*, 4 July 2014, available at: <https://www.ft.com/content/c5d43630-02b7-11e4-8c28-00144feab7de>, last visited: 29 August 2017.

⁸⁶ See: ‘Science, technology and innovation: Gross domestic expenditure on R&D (GERD), GERD as a percentage of GDP, GERD per capita and GERD per researcher’, *UNESCO Institute for Statistics*, available at: <http://data.uis.unesco.org/Index.aspx>, last visited: 29 August 2017.

which could be used for comparative purposes – spends significantly more than the UK, despite having a population over 20% smaller.⁸⁷ This does not bode well for the future of British innovation or industrial design. More positively, the UK is very much “plugged in” to global electronic networks: it has the second highest level of connectivity of all the major powers, after the US.⁸⁸ Britain performs slightly less positively in terms of energy efficiency, but still admirably in relation to its peers, snatching fourth place out of the major powers.⁸⁹ Finally, British universities and research institutes remain world leading in terms of offering resources and environments for technological breakthroughs: UK-based researchers received ten Nobel Prizes from 2007 to 2016, more than any other country except the US, and one more than Japan, which spends significantly more on research and development and has a population almost twice as large as the UK’s.⁹⁰

3.5 British diplomatic leverage

The UK operates a diplomatic network significantly smaller than that of the US, and only very marginally smaller than that of France. It has the world’s third-largest diplomatic portfolio, with 154 embassies (discounting non-resident ambassadors) spread around the world.⁹¹ In addition, Britain is an original and full member of the United Nations Security Council, where it wields veto power. The country is deeply woven in an array of often interlocking alliances and security treaties with foreign powers, which may afford it some influence over its allies’ preferences. Indeed, along with the US, it should not be forgotten that the UK is a key underwriter – as a nuclear custodian – of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), having recently deployed the largest number of forces in the alliance in defence of exposed allies such as Estonia, Lithuania and Romania along the eastern frontier with Russia.⁹² Equally, Britain is deeply involved in several global security arrangements, such as the Five Power Defence Arrangements with Australia, Malaysia, New Zealand and Singapore; the Lancaster House treaties with France; the Mutual Defence Agreement with the US; and the Joint Expeditionary Force with various Northern European countries.⁹³ The UK has also been quietly developing closer security arrangements with Australia, Japan and the Gulf States, which may prove useful in future for defence industrial collaboration and expanded economic interaction, particularly in relation to warships and artillery systems.⁹⁴

In addition to its formal alliances and security arrangements, the UK has pervasively penetrated many of the world’s intergovernmental organisations. In fact, it has the third-largest presence of the major powers: it is a member of 31 global intergovernmental organisations, 17 intercontinental associations, 31 regional groupings and 461 other organisations, and it has signed more than 578 multilateral treaties on a plethora of issues.⁹⁵ This gives the UK a diplomatic presence only marginally smaller than Germany, though somewhat smaller – approximately 13% – than that of France, which leads the world in this field of diplomatic activity.

⁸⁷ See: ‘Population, total’, *World Bank*, available at: <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL?locations=GB-KR>, last visited: 29 August 2017.

⁸⁸ See: ‘Harnessing the Power of Connectivity’, *Huawei* (2017), available at:

http://www.huawei.com/minisite/gci/files/gci_2017_whitepaper_cn.pdf?v=20170602, last visited: 29 August 2017, p. 9.

⁸⁹ See: ‘The International Energy Efficiency Scorecard’, *American Council for an Energy-Efficient Economy*, 2016, available at: <http://aceee.org/portal/national-policy/international-scorecard>, last visited: 29 August 2017.

⁹⁰ See: ‘Nobel Laureates and Research Affiliations’, *Nobel Foundation*, 2016.

⁹¹ See: ‘Find a British embassy, high commission or consulate’, *Gov.uk*.

⁹² For an overview of Britain’s fundamental role in forming NATO, see: Baylis, J., *The Diplomacy of Pragmatism: Britain and the Formation of NATO, 1942-1949* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1993). For an overview of British deterrence activities in relation to NATO’s eastern flank, see: ‘UK troops to take on Nato duties in Poland and Estonia’, *BBC News*, 8 July 2016, available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-36739781>, last visited: 25 August 2017.

⁹³ Compilation based on: Gibler, D., *International Military Alliances, 1648-2008* (Volumes 1-2) (Washington, DC: CQ Press, 2009).

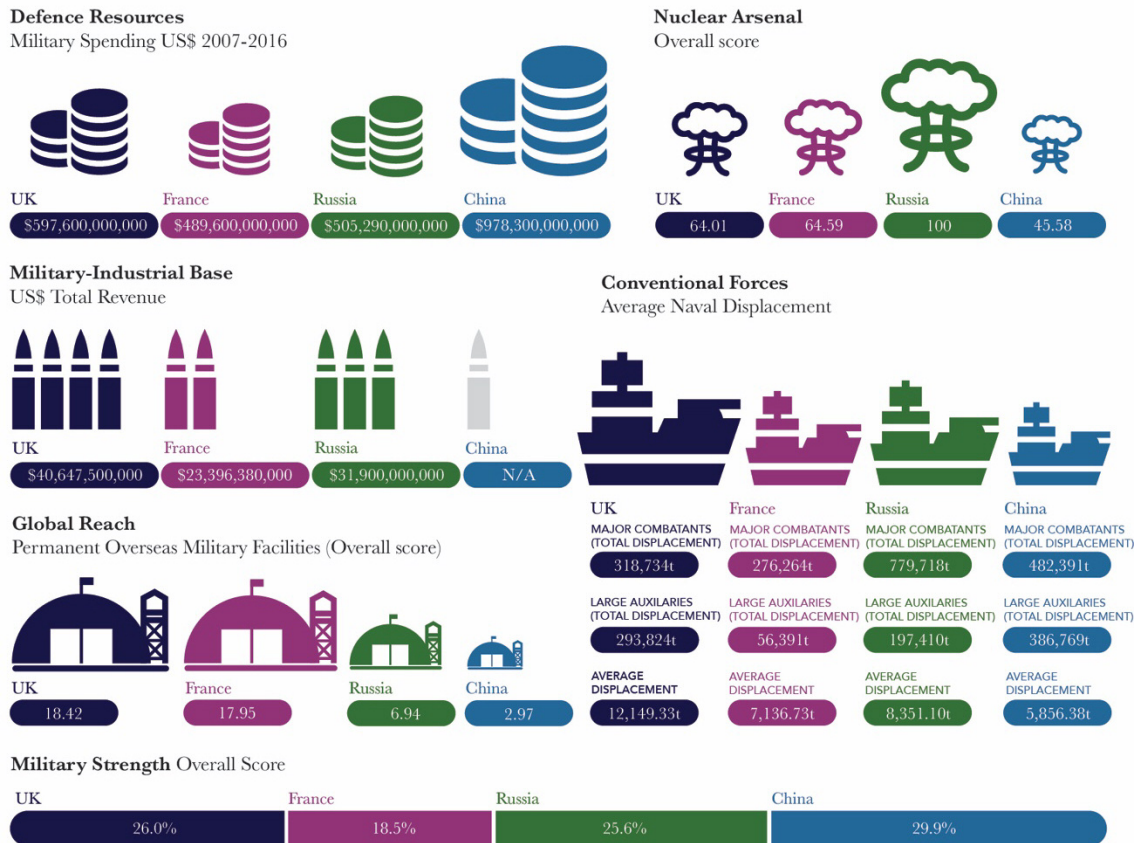
⁹⁴ For a solid overview of cooperation between Britain and Japan, see: Shetler-Jones, P. ‘Searching for the “Strategic” in the UK-Japan “New Type of Alliance”’, *East-West Center* (2015), available at: <https://www.eastwestcenter.org/system/tdf/private/apb306.pdf?file=1&type=node&id=35033>, last visited: 25 June 2017.

⁹⁵ See: ‘The Yearbook of International Organizations’, *Union of International Associations*.

Finally, the UK has built up an impressive capability and infrastructure for the provision of foreign aid. Since the British government – against the backdrop of much controversy – decided to make it law that at least 0.7% of the UK’s economic output each year would be spent on foreign aid, the UK has been the second most generous donor of Official Development Assistance (ODA) over the past five years. It has provided a total of US\$88.4 billion.⁹⁶ This is significantly less than the US\$161.8 billion provided by the US, though somewhat more than the US\$80.6 billion provided by Germany; and significantly more than the US\$47.6 billion delivered by France. However, it should be noted that although Britain has been the world’s second largest ODA provider over the past five years, Germany overtook it in spending by some 20% in 2016, meaning the UK’s lead will be lost unless London decides to up spending. Whether or not this is desirable or achievable is another matter: the recent outcry as to what the money is being spent on has dented public trust in aid spending, while other needs, particularly domestic and military, continue to encourage calls for reduced ODA spending.⁹⁷

3.6 UK military strength

UK MILITARY STRENGTH COMPARED WITH ITS NEAREST PEERS



As shown by the Audit of Geopolitical Capability, and despite significant and unnecessary cuts over the past seven years, the UK is – just – the world’s third-strongest military power. While the

⁹⁶ See: ‘Net ODA’, *Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development*, 2017, available at: <https://data.oecd.org/oda/net-oda.htm>, last visited: 29 August 2017.

⁹⁷ For example, there was widespread concern over the decision to fund a girl band in Somalia to the tune of US\$15.1 million, as well as the provision of aid money to countries that run space or nuclear weapons programmes, namely India. See: ‘Yegna, Ethiopia’s “Spice Girls”, lose UK funding’, *BBC News*, 7 January 2017, available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-38538631>, last visited: 29 August 2017; ‘Who, What, Why: Why does the UK give aid to India?’, *BBC News*, 1 March 2011, available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-12607537>, last visited: 29 August 2017.

British armed forces are not by any means the largest in the world, they nevertheless fare well in relation to the other major powers in terms of global power projection. Over the past ten-year period, the UK has maintained the third-largest defence budget of all the major powers, spending just over 20% more than any other EU country and over 18% more than Russia. That said, there has been a decline in spending of almost 5% over the period in question: from US\$61.1 billion in 2007 to US\$58.4 billion in 2016.⁹⁸ Consequently, the UK – the second-largest defence spender in 2007 – is now only the fourth-biggest among the major powers; worse, its substantial lead over its European partners has been reduced. However, of the major powers, the UK operates the second-largest military industrial base by revenue, with some of the best and most technologically advanced arms manufacturers to be found anywhere.⁹⁹ It also has the second-largest number of overseas military facilities, which are more spread out geographically than any country other than the US, affording the British armed forces an almost unparalleled degree of “global reach”, as well as stations to maintain a strategic presence to support allies and partners and/or undertake humanitarian efforts.¹⁰⁰ Finally, it should not be forgotten that the UK allows the US (and other allies) to use its military facilities, helping to cement the special relationship, which London may be keen to strengthen as it leaves the EU.

Defensively, the UK maintains, for the moment, a potent and cost-effective nuclear arsenal.¹⁰¹ This could – potentially – inflict “unacceptable damage” on any nuclear competitor, hopefully sufficient to deter attacks on critical British interests, not only the national homeland, but also exposed NATO allies in Eastern Europe.¹⁰² Meanwhile, in terms of its ability to project conventional power, the UK fares particularly well: the total naval displacement of the Royal Navy’s major combatants and the Royal Fleet Auxiliary’s large logistical vessels (like replenishment ships and transports) is only exceeded by the US and China, if now by some margin. Moreover, the Royal Navy’s major combatants are nearly matched in displacement by the Royal Fleet Auxiliary’s large logistics vessels: the ratio between the two is almost equal, exceeded only by the US (and Germany, although the *Deutsche Marine* remains very small). Equally, in relation to its main rivals, the average UK warship – with an average displacement of 12,000 tonnes – is over 45% heavier than an average Russian warship and more than double the size of an average Chinese warship. Here, a similar ratio of major combatants to large logistics vessels, combined with a large average displacement, is indicative of a true “blue water” naval fleet.¹⁰³

Consequently, in relation to its European partners, the UK is in effect operating the “Two-Power” standard once again: the total displacement of the major combatants and large logistics vessels of

⁹⁸ See: International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance* (2008–2017).

⁹⁹ Given the rapid growth in equipment of the Chinese armed forces over the past ten years, it is likely that China’s defence-industrial base now exceeds that of the UK in terms of productive capacity, if not technological capability. Unfortunately, given the role of Beijing in the Chinese economy, and the clandestine nature of some of China’s military procurements, the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute cannot produce verifiable data for China. See: ‘SIPRI Arms Industry Database’, *Stockholm International Peace Research Institute*.

¹⁰⁰ The UK’s foreign-hosted military or logistics facilities, buttressing those on its own overseas territories, reinforce its proximity to the world’s maritime chokepoints. For example, from the recently enhanced HMS Juffair in Bahrain, the UK has a permanent foothold close to the Strait of Hormuz, while future plans for birthing rights in Oman may entrench it still further. See: ‘Staying power: Britain’s naval presence in the Gulf’, *Defence and Security Systems International*, 15 December 2016, available at: <http://www.defence-and-security.com/features/featurebritish-base-in-the-gulf-5711080/>, last visited: 29 August 2017. Equally, future collaboration between Royal Navy and the Royal Australian Navy may lead to an enlarged UK presence in South-East Asia. See: ‘British Royal Navy ships could be coming to West Australia’, *The West Australian*, 24 July 2017, available at: <https://thwest.com.au/news/wa/wa-to-benefit-as-uk-lifts-military-presence-ng-b88545837z>, last visited: 29 August 2017.

¹⁰¹ For an overview of the UK’s nuclear capability, see: Chalmers, M., ‘Towards the UK’s Nuclear Century’, *The RUSI Journal* 158:6 (2013). Whether or not the existing or planned deterrent will be sufficient for the future is an important question. The nature of warfare is becoming increasingly “non-linear”. The strategic deterrent may need to be compensated by an effective and credible tactical nuclear capability, as well as strategic and theatre ballistic missile defences. For a discussion of these options, see: Futter, A., ‘Trident Replacement and UK Nuclear Deterrence: Requirements in an Uncertain Future’, *The RUSI Journal* 160:5 (2015): pp. 64-66.

¹⁰² The utility of the UK (and US) strategic deterrent is only credible in relation to the eastern flank of NATO if it “intersects” with forwardly deployed conventional forces. See: Rogers, J. and Martinescu, A., ‘After Crimea: Time for a New British Geostrategy for Eastern Europe?’, *The Henry Jackson Society* (2015), available at: <http://henryjacksonsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/After-Crimea.pdf>, last visited: 29 August 2017.

¹⁰³ See: Saunders, S. and Philpott, T., *Jane’s Fighting Ships 2016–2017*; International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance* (2017).

the UK Naval Services, at some 612,500 tonnes, is significantly greater than the combined equivalent of the French and German fleets.¹⁰⁴ As Sir Malcolm Rifkind puts it:

The Royal Navy, even in its current reduced state, remains Europe’s paramount naval and maritime power; a position that will be further enhanced when the two new carriers come into service.¹⁰⁵

Indeed, with the commissioning of the new Queen Elizabeth class supercarriers, as well as the remaining Astute class submarines and the Tide class logistical support vessels by the early- or mid-2020s, the UK naval services may reach a total displacement exceeding the next *three* largest EU navies combined, i.e., France, Italy and Spain.¹⁰⁶

3.7 British cultural prestige

Much ado has been made in recent years – or, if “Cool Britannia” is recalled, recent decades – about the UK’s supposed cultural attraction, with Portland’s “Soft Power” Index placing the country in first place in 2015 and in second place both this year and last.¹⁰⁷ The Audit of Geopolitical Capability also shows clearly that the UK excels in this field: it comes out with the second-highest score in the cultural category, although “cultural prestige” should not be directly compared with so-called “soft power”.¹⁰⁸ While the UK is still somewhat less capable than the US, it nonetheless holds a significant lead over all its other peers, including those on the European mainland. In some respects, it is so strong that it is approaching the status of a “cultural superpower”.¹⁰⁹ Undoubtedly, this is because the UK remains – as it has always been – one of the most open, free and liberal nations in the world, with one of the strongest degrees of political freedom to be found anywhere.¹¹⁰ This political freedom is the foundation of a dynamic and creative civil society, concentrated in the country’s large “clusters of creativity”, particularly London, but also Manchester, Birmingham, Glasgow, Edinburgh, Leeds, Cardiff and Bristol, among others.¹¹¹ Over the years, British political freedoms have attracted migrants from around the world, which has further enhanced the creativity of the British people.

Accordingly, the UK has a potent “discursive capacity”, which further amplifies British principles and ideas. Britain has the joint-highest language connectivity in the world. Owing to the pre-eminence of the UK and US during the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries, English has slowly risen to become the world’s first truly *lingua franca*, as well as the most connected language on Earth, insofar as it is used as a medium for translation.¹¹² At the same time, the UK’s

¹⁰⁴ The “Two-Power” standard was formally adopted by the UK in 1889 via the Naval Defence Act. This act stipulated that the Royal Navy should be at least equal to the next two largest navies in the world, at the time those of France and Russia. See: Friedberg, A. L., *The Weary Titan: Britain and the Experience of Relative Decline, 1895-1905* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1988), pp. 144-152.

¹⁰⁵ See: Rifkind, M., ‘Close military ties with Europe must remain’, *The Times*, 14 August 2017, available at: <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/close-military-ties-with-europe-must-remain-f5mr9t5mv>, last visited: 29 August 2017.

¹⁰⁶ Calculated from a range of online sources, in addition to: Saunders, S. and Tim Philpott, *Jane’s Fighting Ships 2016–2017*; International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance (2017)*.

¹⁰⁷ See: ‘The Soft Power 30’, *Portland Communications*, 2017, available at: <http://softpower30.com/>, last visited: 29 August 2017.

¹⁰⁸ As pointed out in Section 2, “soft power” is largely a false concept. The diffusion of a particular culture or ideology always involves the vandalism, repression and even dislocation of another.

¹⁰⁹ See, for example: Mazzel, N., ‘Britain Should Be A Soft Power Super-Power’, *Huffpost blogs*, 24 October 2016, available at: http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/nicholas-mazzei/britain-should-be-a-soft-power_b_12575488.html, last visited: 29 August 2013; *British Politics Review: Journal of the British Politics Society, Norway* 6:1 (2011), available at: http://www.britishpoliticsociety.no/British%20Politics%20Review%2001_2011.pdf, last visited: 29 August 2017.

¹¹⁰ See: ‘Freedom in the World 2017: Table of Country Scores’, *Freedom House*, 2017, available at: <https://freedomhouse.org/report/fiw-2017-table-country-scores>, last visited: 29 August 2017

¹¹¹ For an overview of the UK’s clusters of creativity, see: Mateos-Garcia, J. and Bakhshi, H., ‘The Geography of Creativity in the UK: Creative clusters, creative people and creative networks’, *Nesta* (2016), available at: http://www.nesta.org.uk/sites/default/files/the_geography_of_creativity_in_the_uk.pdf, last visited: 29 August 2017.

¹¹² See: ‘Global Language Network – Books Rankings’, *Global Language Network*, available at: language.media.mit.edu/rankings/books, last visited: 29 August 2018.

dynamic civil society has allowed for the emergence of an array of think tanks and other research institutions, which act not only as promoters and articulators for British ideas, but also cross over into the technological domain and buttress the formal “knowledge base”, i.e. the universities and schools.¹¹³ In addition, the UK has the second-largest number of major publishing houses in the world, which print an astonishing array of books that often feature authors who have been part of British scholarly life, further reflecting and promoting Britain’s culture.¹¹⁴

However, British brands are somewhat less successful globally, particularly in relation to their European counterparts. Although the UK, with seven of the world’s Top 100 most popular brands, does better than Japan (with six), France owns eight and Germany has nine.¹¹⁵ Equally, perhaps reflected by the fact that the British climate can be less pleasant and predictable than elsewhere, the UK does less well at attracting foreign tourists to visit the country, coming fifth after France, China, the US and Germany.¹¹⁶ However, in terms of encouraging foreign tourists to part with their money in British attractions, restaurants and shops, the UK does better, at third place.¹¹⁷ Nevertheless, in terms of the ability to attract foreign students to read for degrees in British universities, the UK is performing strongly: the country is the second-largest recipient among the major powers of foreign students. Reflecting also the technological prowess of the country, British universities attract half as many foreign students as the US, despite having a far smaller population and tertiary education sector; they also attract almost double the number that Germany, France and Russia manage to encourage to their own institutions.¹¹⁸

3.8 So what position does the UK hold?

As Figure 1 shows, the Audit of Geopolitical Capability reveals that the UK is currently the world’s second most geopolitically capable nation, albeit far behind the US, which leads in every category bar demographic condition. Reaching the penultimate position in three different categories (“geographic integration”, “technological prowess” and “cultural prestige”) and third position in two categories (“military strength” and “diplomatic leverage”, behind China in the former and France in the latter), the UK performs relatively well across most categories. Accordingly, given the capacity of the British government and the country’s global geographic reach, multiplied by its diplomatic leverage and military strength, and compounded by its cultural prestige, the UK stands firmly as a global power, with approximately 40% of the geopolitical capability of the US. How long the UK can hold on to this penultimate spot, however, is open to question: based on current projections in relation to several of the indicators used in the audit, China is almost certain to eventually eclipse the UK, and potentially by some margin given the vast size of the country’s population. Indeed, the Chinese have already piggybacked far over the UK in relation to economic clout and military strength (the country has always had a far larger population). Yet Beijing does not have access to so many evenly spread capabilities, and China’s cultural prestige remains particularly weak.¹¹⁹ Meanwhile, for all the talk of the imminent decline of the UK in relation to its European counterparts, the audit reveals that, in the event of any slippage resulting from withdrawal from the EU, the British have a long way to fall until the French or Germans manage to overtake them, though this should not allow for complacency.

¹¹³ See: McGann, J. G., ‘2016 Global Go To Think Tank Index Report’, *Think Tanks and Civil Societies Programme* (2017).

¹¹⁴ See: Milliot, J., ‘The World’s 52 Largest Book Publishers, 2016’, *Publishers Weekly*, 26 August 2016.

¹¹⁵ See: ‘Best Global Brands 2016 Rankings’, *Interbrand*, 2016.

¹¹⁶ See: ‘International tourism, number of arrivals’, *World Bank*, 2015.

¹¹⁷ See: ‘International tourism, receipts (current US\$)’, *World Bank*, 2015.

¹¹⁸ See: ‘Total inbound internationally mobile students’, *UNESCO Institute for Statistics*, 2015.

¹¹⁹ China’s lacking cultural appeal is also shown by Portland’s Soft Power Index (see Annex C)

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AUDIT OF
GEOPOLITICAL
CAPABILITY
Countries Scaled
by Rank

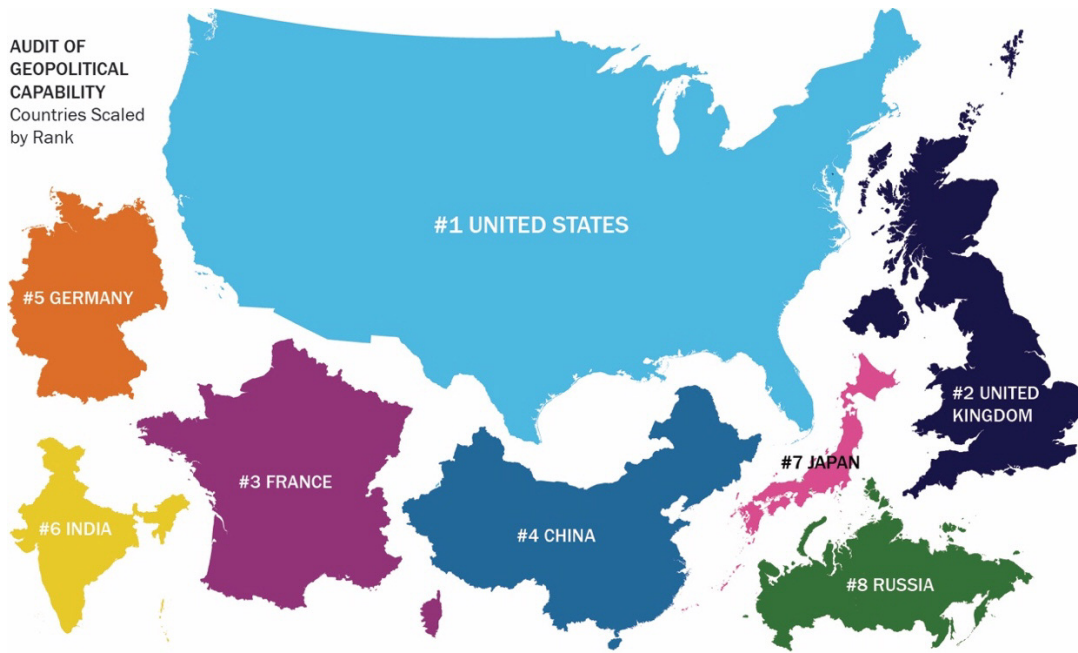


Figure 1: The results from the Audit of Geopolitical Capability

4. Towards “Global Britain”?

Given the evidence from this research shows that the UK remains – even with China rising rapidly – the world’s second most geopolitically capable country, and certainly the strongest European power, Britain is far from being “the sick man of Europe”.¹²⁰ By global standards, the country is awash with capability: in fact, it is one of the most geographically lucky, most stable and integrated, wealthiest, most creative, innovative and admired nations in the world. To deploy one of Winston Churchill’s parliamentary quips: “Panic may resent it, ignorance may deride it, malice may distort it, but there it is.”¹²¹ Unfortunately, the panic resulting from the outcome of the referendum in June 2016 has certainly shaken some Britons so profoundly that they look inevitably to their nation’s decline. Ignorance has also revealed itself, as national capability has come to be equated with physical size and raw mass, and the likes of China and Russia are inflated in power and scope, ready to usurp the Western democracies. Malice, too, has taken its toll. The articulation of declinist narratives, especially by those that seek either to disrupt the result of the referendum, or capitalise on its resulting political consequences, are never helpful, creative or productive.

The key question is: can the UK harness its capabilities and deliver on its potential in the twenty-first century, particularly under mounting international competition? Can it turn its capabilities into *power* to prevent actions it considers antithetical to its national interests, while simultaneously shaping the European and global environments in ways that it favours? Here, it is perhaps propitious to begin by extrapolating from Charles Pasley. He penned the first modern treatise on geopolitical affairs in 1810, providing a geostrategy not only for the defeat of Napoleonic France, but also for Britain’s subsequent global rise.¹²² He asserted:

The safety of nations is, in a great measure, independent of fortune, so that their every increase of strength and power must originate, almost entirely, in the wisdom and energy of their own measures, and that their downfall [sic.], whenever it happens, ought to be ascribed more to their own imbecility, than to any external force...¹²³

The answer, then, is that it depends. It depends on the strategic choices the UK makes in the years ahead. Britain will almost certainly be faced by many challenging internal and external problems over the coming years, of which leaving the EU is only one. Very powerful countries – for example, Ming China, Habsburg Spain, the United Provinces, the German Empire and both Tsarist and Soviet Russia – have all made poor decisions in the past, almost to the point of sliding into irrelevance, foreign occupation or revolution. Of course, the UK does not face problems on the scale of those countries, or even like those faced by British leaders in the past. However, poor decisions and political infighting could lead to the nation’s decline towards becoming little more than a fringe power on the edge of the European continent, a geostrategic fate British diplomats

¹²⁰ See: ‘Britain faces up to Brexit’, *The Economist*, 22 July 2017; “Britain is fast becoming the sick man of Europe” – experts debate Brexit data’, *The Guardian*, 24 July 2017.

¹²¹ Cited in: Parliamentary records, *Houses of Parliament*, 17 May 1916, available at: http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1916/may/17/royal-assent#column_1578, last visited: 29 August 2017.

¹²² See: Johnson, P., *The Birth of the Modern: World Society, 1815-1830* (London: Phoenix, 1991), pp. 16-17.

¹²³ See: Pasley, C. W., *Essay on the Military Policy and Institutions of the British Empire* (London: D. N. Shury, 1810). It is worth pointing out that Pasley’s treatise seems to have had significant impact on British society during the period in which it was published. Even Jane Austen, the early nineteenth-century novelist, was awash with praise. She described his work as “well written and highly entertaining”, and Captain Pasley himself as someone who writes “with extraordinary force and spirit”. See: Boyd, G., ‘Letter to the Editor’, *The Spectator*, 14 June 1913, p. 14.

and strategists have tried assiduously to prevent for the past five centuries.¹²⁴ But irrespective of whether or not one thinks the British decision to leave the EU is akin to what Pasley described as “imbecility”, the UK has not yet reached the moment whereby its decline is certain, let alone imminent.

Just over 20 years ago, before he became prime minister, Tony Blair underlined the need for determination, at Bridgewater House in Manchester:

Century after century it has been the destiny of Britain to lead other nations. That should not be a destiny that is part of our history. It should be part of our future. We are a leader of nations, or nothing.¹²⁵

This gets to the nub of the issue: although the British people may still preside over substantial geopolitical capabilities and resources, do they actually *want* to be “a leader of nations” or would they prefer to become “nothing”? Either way, the future is far from determined and is largely what the nation decides to make of it. Decline is as much a choice as a historical force over which the British government and people have no control. Choosing to be “nothing” is always an option – and Britons could have opted to be “nothing” in 1914, 1939, 1982, and on countless other occasions besides. But, rightly, they opted for more: they understood the stakes, and what would have happened to their precious national institutions, their legal system and their buoyant civil society, cultivated over many centuries, as well as their way of life, if they had failed.

If the UK still wants to be “something”, it will require a new national purpose. As the Chairman of the Parliamentary Foreign Affairs Committee, Tom Tugendhat MP, has argued, “We must decide what kind of nation we are going to be in international affairs. If we do not, the world will decide for us.”¹²⁶ After the EU referendum, the country needs a cross-partisan project of national revival, which tries to overcome the polarisation and unhealthy political fissures that have opened up over the past year. While the UK must leave the EU in accordance with the result of the referendum, it must not become a small, closed and parochial country, let alone a grumpy “little England”. This would be a certain route to “nothing”. Maintaining the UK’s traditional character as an open, tolerant, liberal and democratic nation – a “Global Britain” – will be necessary to satisfy those who wanted to remain in the EU. Equally, the UK will require a new and positive partnership with the EU, its closest neighbour and an important pacifier of intra-European squabbles, even if European integration remains supplementary to NATO, and ultimately American and British strategic power.

As the Audit of Geopolitical Capability has revealed, relative to the other major powers, the UK has an effective government system, considerable geographic cohesion, a degree of global military reach and substantial cultural prestige. However, it is clear that the UK economy is underperforming. Keeping the economy at the cutting edge – a key component of the national project of “Global Britain” – will depend on significant investment in the country’s “arteries of commerce”, namely the communications infrastructure (roads, railways and air transport), as well as “connectivity” (i.e., telecommunications and the internet), not least owing to the projected growth of the British population over the coming decades. For example, time wasted in traffic

¹²⁴ See: Simms, B., *Britain’s Europe: A Thousand Years of Conflict and Cooperation* (London: Allen Lane, 2016).

¹²⁵ Cited in: Kampflner, J. *Blair’s Wars* (London: Free Press, 2004), p. 3.

¹²⁶ See: Tugendhat, T., “The UK must not step away from the world stage because of Brexit”, *Financial Times*, 15 July 2017, available at: <https://www.ft.com/content/caaa6d4e-68af-11e7-9a66-93fb352ba1fe>, last visited: 29 August 2017.

jams on overloaded motorways, in packed trains with inadequate carrying capacity, or on slow internet connections, reduces productivity, and, in turn, economic growth. Equally, it is clear that the UK must do more to boost funding in research and development. Even Russia, the weakest of the eight major powers, spends nearly as much as the UK, despite having an economic output almost half the size. This is disturbing, not least because – aside its liberal political culture and stable democratic institutions – it is technology that has given Britain the edge over the past three centuries. Stronger support must also be given to the secondary and tertiary education sectors – both academic and technical – as well as to British academics, particularly those in the fields of science, medicine and technology, to compensate for any funding lost as a result of a lack of access to EU-funded programmes.

Military strength is another area where the UK should pay closer attention. In many respects, while balanced capabilities are essential, the armed forces are the most significant instrument any country has to deter or dissuade threats to its interests and to project itself internationally. This is especially the case for a country that – in the words of Theresa May on welcoming the HMS Queen Elizabeth supercarrier to Portsmouth for the first time – is “determined to remain a fully engaged global power, working closely with our friends and allies around the world”.¹²⁷ Without strong armed forces, British principles, diplomacy or economic instruments may not be by themselves sufficient to ensure the upholding of national interests. Equally, the armed forces have a certain magnetism in their own right, potentially with economic and political benefits, particularly when smaller powers gravitate to the country equipped with them for security and defence. The impact of the sight of a British warship turning up in a foreign port flying the White Ensign or a barracks in a foreign country is said to exceed a thousand diplomats; it also serves as a visible reminder to the world of the UK’s ability to extend itself wherever it deems necessary. Britain must continue to undergird its principles with significant capabilities, ultimately, via a strong military with international reach, helping to guarantee its international success.

Unfortunately, as most other Western countries have cut back their armed forces even more severely, the defence cuts made by successive British governments since the end of the Cold War have taken their toll, reducing London’s influence, as well as the more general aura of British power. As it moves through the process of withdrawing from the EU, the government must consider increasing defence spending, in relative terms, i.e., in terms of the percentage of GDP, so that the country can maintain its lead and reveal decisively the so-called “security surplus” it has in relation to its EU partners.¹²⁸ Without this, British military capabilities, while considerable in relation to the other powers (with the exception of China and the US, and to some extent Russia), are likely to decline further, owing to insufficient resource management and an inadequate share of national resources being allocated for military purposes. It should never be forgotten that the 2% of GDP allocated to defence – today often celebrated (and unwisely) – was considered in the 1990s as only the *bare minimum* required to uphold a peacetime defence posture in a world, unlike today, where the UK had no peer competitors.

Now, with Russia and China allocating progressively more resources to their armed forces, and with the US commitment dependent on greater European participation in the West’s common

¹²⁷ May, T., ‘HMS Queen Elizabeth, Portsmouth: Theresa May’s Speech’, *Gov.uk*, 16 August 2017, available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/hms-queen-elizabeth-portsmouth-theresa-mays-speech>, last visited: 29 August 2017.

¹²⁸ See: Chalmers, M., ‘UK Foreign and Security Policy after Brexit’, *Royal United Services Institute* (2017), available at: https://rusi.org/sites/default/files/201701_bp_uk_foreign_and_security_policy_after_brexit_v4.pdf, last visited: 29 August 2017, pp. 4-5.

strategic endeavour, the need to rebuild British defences has become more pressing. Russian and Chinese warships, for example, have been turning up with greater frequency off the coasts of the UK or the shores of its NATO allies. In July 2017, a Chinese flotilla turned up for the first time in history in Northern Europe, outside the Russian enclave of Kaliningrad, before joining exercises with Russia’s Baltic Fleet, after a similar engagement in the Mediterranean Sea.¹²⁹ Equally, Russia’s warships have been showing up more frequently around the British Isles, before moving on to stir the pot of conflict in Syria.¹³⁰ While, short of war, this activity cannot be directly prevented, it can be indirectly curtailed through the funding and construction of large and technologically advanced vessels for the Royal Navy. When countries like the UK (and US) uphold the means to take war to potential competitors, those opponents often react accordingly.¹³¹ In other words, the more the UK invests in large “blue water” vessels, the more likely competitors will invest heavily in “fleets-in-being” or coastal patrol forces, which will remain – owing to their size and specification – trapped in the “brown” and “green” waters surrounding their national homelands. This will ensure – as it has in the past – that competitors are less able to move into more distant waters or littorals where they might be able to disrupt British interests. Finally, an enhanced UK military capacity should also provide the country with a potent instrument to undergird two of the most important and traditional aspects of British strategic policy: firstly, to remind the US that the UK is still a responsible stakeholder in the world order; and, secondly, to reassure its European partners that, despite withdrawal from the EU, it will remain heavily invested as a major stakeholder in their own continental order and defence.

To summarise, according to the Audit of Geopolitical Capability, although the British economy could be further empowered and the military better resourced, the UK still has an impressive range of capabilities at its disposal. Despite the drawdown from empire, the financial crisis and the recent political polarisation that has resulted from the outcome of the EU referendum, Britain remains one of the most capable countries in the world, and certainly the most capable in Europe. Britons must never forget that, unlike France and Germany, or any other country enveloped by the EU, their country is set to become the freest in Europe, with its own – highly successful and recently reconfirmed – political union, now more than three centuries old, as well as its own currency, foreign policy and armed forces. Yet capability does not automatically translate into political influence or power. Nor does it necessarily ensure that decline will not take place. Decline is never preordained, but it can certainly be a choice. A national vision and a grand strategy would help the UK to harness its capabilities and put them to use in binding the country together, and helping it chart a new destiny, both on the European mainland and around the world. “Global Britain” could act to encapsulate both; therefore, this national vision needs to be expanded and developed more rigorously.

¹²⁹ See: Hille, K., ‘Chinese warships join Russia in Baltic naval drill’, *Financial Times*, 25 July 2017, available at: <https://www.ft.com/content/1dfabf08-7076-11e7-93ff-99f383b09ff9>, last visited: 29 August 2017; Gady, F.-S., ‘Chinese Navy Conducts Live-Fire Drill in Mediterranean Sea’, *The Diplomat*, 13 July 2017, available at: <http://thediplomat.com/2017/07/chinese-navy-conducts-live-fire-drill-in-mediterranean-sea/>, last visited: 29 August 2017.

¹³⁰ The Russians have made several passages within UK areas of interest in recent years, close to the British Isles, either deploying en route to the Mediterranean or partaking in other military activities, frequently in the North Atlantic. For a comprehensive overview, see: Foxall, A., ‘Close Encounters: Russian Military Activities in the Vicinity of UK Air and Sea Space, 2005–2016’, *The Henry Jackson Society*, July 2017, available at: <http://henryjacksonsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Close-Encounters-002.pdf>, last visited 29 August 2017. See also: ‘UK warship escorts Russian carrier in English Channel’, *BBC News*, 25 January 2017, available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-38745364>, last visited: 16 August 2017; ‘UK warships shadowing Russian naval task force’, *BBC News*, 20 October 2016, available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-37719847>, last visited: 29 August 2017.

¹³¹ See: Lubin, G., ‘PROFESSOR: Here’s Why Britain’s Military Could Beat China’, *Business Insider*, 3 January 2014, available at: <http://www.businessinsider.com/why-britains-military-could-beat-china-2014-1>, last visited: 29 August 2017.

Appendix

A. Categories, indicators and components

1. Geographic integration			
Indicator	Component	Source	Date
Government cohesion	Stability (score)	World Bank	2015
	Effectiveness (score)	World Bank	2015
	Rule of law (score)	World Bank	2015
	Lack of corruption (score)	World Bank	2015
National spread	Land area (total km ²)	CIA World Factbook	2017
	Exclusive Economic Zone (total km ²)	Sea Around Us	2016
		Marine Plan	2010
Overseas extension	Overseas extension (total km)	Google Maps	2017
Energy autonomy	Net energy imported (score)	World Bank	2015-2014
Communications infrastructure	Railways (per km ²)	CIA World Factbook	2017-2014
	Paved highways (per km ²)	CIA World Factbook	2015-2009
		Indian Ministry of Road, Transport and Highways	2014
	Registered vessels (gross tonnage)	UK Government	2014
	Air transport (departures per year)	World Bank	2015
2. Demographic condition			
Indicator	Component	Source	Date
Population size	Population (total)	World Bank	2016
Absorption capability	Positive net migration (total)	UNDESA Population Division	2015-2010
	Positive net migration (per 100 people)	UNDESA Population Division	2015-2010
Population balance	Median age (years)	CIA World Factbook	2016
Renewal capacity	Fertility rate (percentage)	World Bank	2016
Effective longevity	Healthy life expectancy (years)	World Health Organisation	2015
3. Economic clout			
Indicator	Component	Source	Date
Economic yield	Gross Domestic Product (US\$ nominal)	World Bank	2016
	Net wealth (total US\$)	Credit Suisse	2016
Business environment	Ease of Doing Business (score)	World Bank	2017
Financial control	Connectivity of major world cities (score)	<i>Global Urban Analysis</i>	2011
Corporate size	No. of Forbes 2000 companies (total)	Forbes	2017
	No. of Forbes 2000 companies (total in Top 500)	Forbes	2017
Economic structuration	Exports of goods and services (total US\$)	World Bank	2016-2015
	Foreign Direct Investment outward stock (total US\$)	UN World Investment Report	2017
4. Technological prowess			
Indicator	Component	Source	Date
Knowledge base	Education Index (score)	UNESCO	2015
	No. of Top 200 universities (score)	Times Higher Education	2017-2016
Research spending	Total spending (US\$)	UNESCO Institute for Statistics	2015
	Spending as a percentage of GDP	UNESCO Institute for Statistics	2015
Connectivity	Connectivity (score)	Huawei	2017
Energy efficiency	Energy efficiency (score)	American Council for an Energy Efficient Economy	2016
Innovativeness	No. of Nobel Prizes received in Chemistry, Physics and Physiology and Medicine (over the past ten years) (total)	Nobel Foundation	2016-2007

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5. Diplomatic leverage			
Indicator	Component	Source	Date
Diplomatic reach	Total overseas missions (score)	National diplomatic services	2017
Diplomatic centrality	Membership of the UN Security Council (score)	UN Security Council	2017
Strategic institutionalisation	Participation in alliances and security arrangements (score)	Based on <i>International Military Alliances</i> , 1648-2008 (Volumes 1 and 2)	2017-2008
Intergovernmental penetration	Membership of intergovernmental organisations (total)	<i>Yearbook of International Associations</i>	2017
Developmental assistance	Official Development Assistance (total US\$)	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development	2016

6. Military strength			
Indicator	Component	Source	Date
Defence resources	Military expenditure over a ten year period (US\$)	<i>The Military Balance</i>	2017-2008
Military-industrial base	No. of Top 100 arms producing companies (total revenue US\$)	Stockholm International Peace Research Institute	2015
Nuclear arsenal	Deployed warheads (total)	Federation of American Scientists	2016
	Reserve warheads (total)	Federation of American Scientists	2016
	Second-strike capability (score)	Various	2017
	Striking range (score)	Various	2017
	Delivery platforms (score)	Various	2017
	Nuclear reputation (years)	Various	2017
Global reach	No. of overseas military facilities (score)	Various	2017
	Spread of overseas military facilities (score)	Various	2017
Conventional forces	Total displacement of major combatants (tonnes)	<i>Jane's Fighting Ships 2016-17</i> <i>The Military Balance 2017</i>	2015 2017
	Total displacement of large logistical vessels (tonnes)	<i>Jane's Fighting Ships 2016-17</i> <i>The Military Balance 2017</i>	2015 2017
	Average displacement (tonnes)	<i>Jane's Fighting Ships 2016-17</i> <i>The Military Balance 2017</i>	2015 2017

7. Cultural prestige			
Indicator	Component	Source	Date
National creativity	Political freedom (score)	Freedom House	2017
Discursive capacity	Centrality of the main language (score)	Global Language Network	2014
	No. of research institutions and think tanks (total)	Think Tanks and Civil Societies Programme	2016
	No. of Top 52 publishing houses (total revenue US\$)	<i>Publisher's Weekly</i>	2016
Economic pull	No. of Top 100 global brands (total)	Interbrand	2016
National appeal	Overseas tourist arrivals (total)	World Bank	2016-2015
	Overseas tourist receipts (total US\$)	World Bank	2016-2015
Educational allure	International students from overseas in tertiary educational institutions (total)	UNESCO	2015-2014

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